

# SOUTH AMERICA

## SCHOOL GUIDE

*Plan Your Trip*





## How to plan the perfect student trip to South America Brought to you by Evolve Tours

Welcome! Evolve Tours has designed this guide as a helpful resource for those interested in planning a trip for their students to a South American destination. In the following pages, you'll discover how to decide on the type of trip for you, the right destination, some of the activities your students can enjoy in South America, where to sleep, where to eat, an explanation of travel insurance, travel tips and more. Our goal is to make the trip planning process as seamless and as stress free for you and your colleagues as possible.

### *Why should my student group visit South America?*

An educational trip to South America can be a fascinating educational and cultural experience for students. Considering the various destinations of potential trips can seem overwhelming at first. The best first is to determining the intended focus of the educational trip, after which you can then decide which South American regions best suit what you and your group are looking to experience. For example:

**Biology-** Show your science students the incredible biodiversity of this continent, by having them participate in meaningful field research. Consider a trip to the Galapagos Islands!

**Language** - Are you a Spanish language teacher who would love for your students to partake in language workshops in Santiago? Or maybe Portuguese is your group's language of choice? Rio de Janeiro will have them speaking like locals in no time.

**Outdoor Adventure-** Do you want your students to experience both ancient history, and outdoor activities? Try an adventure tour like trekking in Peru!

**Community Service** – Want to make an impact with your travels? There are a number of destinations that offer a chance to put some volunteer hours to good use while being immersed in a local community. Mainland Ecuador is a great example of this.

**Mixed focus-** A balance of educational activities, outdoor activities, and cultural focus. The variety of geography, culture and history of within South America makes for a well-rounded trip.



South America is a fantastic destination for students of the following subjects: Geography, History, Spanish Language, Portuguese Language, Outdoor Education, Social Studies, History, Philosophy, World Religion and more! Whatever subject your student group is interested in, there's sure to be a South American destination perfect for your students.

### ***Regions of South America***

South America is a large continent, with a large variety of countries and areas complete with their own unique geography, culture, history and travel incentives. Even within each country, there are various regions which can be the backdrop for very different styles of student trips.

South America includes: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela. By most considerations, South America also includes some of the nearby islands off the coast, such as the Galapagos Islands and Easter Island.

As the largest country in South America, Brazil dominates almost half of the continent's surface area. The remaining regions are divided into the Andean States, the Guianas and the Southern Cone.

**Andean States** – The western part of South America, named after the mountainous regions of these countries. Includes Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

**The Guianas** – A region in North-eastern South America, including French Guiana, Guyana and Suriname.

**Southern Cone** – The southernmost areas of South America. Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Southern Brazil.

## ***What time of the year should my student group visit South America?***

### ***Weather and Climate***

Weather and climate depends greatly on the region(s) of South America your group plans on visiting, as South America has climates as diverse as tropical rainforests to cold highlands can vary greatly. Amazon rainforest visitors may go year round as the climate there is packed with rain, heat and humidity no matter the month. The southern tip of the continent has similar weather to North America during winter and summer, however these seasons' dates are opposite in this region (i.e. summer is December through February, and winter is May through September). Weather in northern South America- from Peru, Ecuador and the Galapagos- can generally be split into the wet season (November to March) and dry season (April to October).



### ***Educational Trip Length***

Most South America trips are 7 to 14 days long, though trip length varies depending on countries visiting, activities planned and budget.

Check the following links for more information about South American weather throughout the year and some tips on deciding when to travel.

<http://www.climateandweather.com/weather-in-south-america>

<http://traveltips.usatoday.com/time-visit-South-America-16032.html>

## What are The Best Student-Friendly Activities in South America?

Check out this list for some of Evolve Tour's favourite and most popular activities for school groups in various South American areas:



### Ecuador

- Hiking to the base of Chimborazo Volcano
- Quito Walking Tour
- Otavalo Market (Largest market in South America)
- Community service project with indigenous community

### Galapagos Islands

- Volunteering
- Snorkeling at Kicker Rock
- See sea lions, marine turtles, blue footed boobies and frigate birds up close
- Service projects
- Surfing

### Peru

- Culinary Arts
- Machu Pichu

For more information about all of the above attractions and more, visit:

[http://www.lonelyplanet.com/South America/things-](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/South America/things-to-do/top-things-to-do-in-South America)

[to-do/top-things-to-do-in-South America](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/South America/things-to-do/top-things-to-do-in-South America)

## Should I work with a travel company?

Our next step is deciding whether you will plan the trip on your own, or use the help of a student travel provider. Some teachers are used to planning the trip themselves, but many enjoy the less stressful and time consuming route of hiring a travel company that will expertly take care of all the pre-trip planning. To make the decision easier, we've made some comparison charts, comparing the pros and cons of doing a trip on your own vs. with a tour provider.

### ON YOUR OWN

Pros	Cons
✓ Cheaper	✗ A lot of stressful planning. Organizing the hotels, transportation, meals, activities and more.
✓ Plan exactly what you want, without sticking to a schedule	✗ Missing out on professional, time-tested itineraries.
	✗ No on-ground tour director with local knowledge who oversees the trip.

**WITH A TOUR COMPANY**

Pros	Cons
<p>✓ Having a guide(s) with local knowledge. As with any form of travel, whether it be museum hopping or outdoor activities, you're bound to learn more, gain a greater understanding of the local community, and just get more out of the whole experience when following a knowledgeable expert.</p>	<p>✗ Set itinerary: although some travel companies like Evolve Tours are flexible and dedicated to customizing their trips, many others offer no customization.</p>
<p>✓ Safety and Security- A travel provider will ensure all supplier companies (restaurants, hotels, activities) are safe, reputable and provide quality services. As well, emergency protocols and first-aid trained tour staff.</p>	
<p>✓ No details to worry about! You're free to focus fully on the ride, and have someone else sweat over the small, yet paramount details.</p>	<p>✗ Generally, planning with a tour company is more expensive than doing it on your own.</p>
<p>✓ Allergy, food restrictions communicated to all the suppliers (hotels, restaurants and activities)</p>	
<p>✓ Group rates on transportation and accommodation since they work with suppliers year round with many student groups</p>	
<p>✓ Years of expertise</p>	

***How to choose the perfect student travel company***

(Adapted from "How to Choose a Reputable Adventure Travel Company or Guide" at <http://gadling.com/2011/08/05/a-guide-to-choosing-adventure-travel-companies-and-guides/> )

There are many student travel companies nationwide that run South America trips. Not all are created equal. There are some key things you should look for when choosing a company to plan and run your student trip. Check out the following tips on what to look for or avoid.





### Reputation and Safety

A brief online search will bring to light any serious breaches in safety or conduct. Safety doesn't just apply to those who plan to scale the Andes or kayak the Zambezi. Even the tamest "adventures" require guides who are knowledgeable about the area and activity. Make sure you have someone on hand that is currently certified in emergency first aid and rescue procedure and ensure that the company has emergency protocols and risk management policies in place and that the truly value safety over all else.

### Client Communication

How clear and accurate is the company's literature or website? How long does it take them to respond to your emails or phone calls? A few days is standard, but if you find yourself having to follow up repeatedly, move on. A reputable travel company will detail exactly what is included and what is not for the price. All services should be clearly spelled out and agreed upon.

### Customized Itineraries

A legitimate student travel provider will have trip itineraries that they have successfully run time and time again. They know what works and developed what they believe to be a flawless itinerary. However, there is a big plus when finding a travel company who is flexible with their itineraries. Find someone who will work with you to create the best possible custom itinerary for your group's needs.

### Guide qualifications

Are their guides knowledgeable about the region you are visiting? Do they have experience leading trips there? Ideal guides will have experience travelling in the cities you are visiting and will be energetic, informative, entertaining and organized.

### Ask for referrals

We suggest asking a tour company for referrals of other schools who they have run South America trips before. You can also look at reviews on sites like TripAdvisor.com, or search travel blogs.

"In the end, sometimes it just comes down to how comfortable a person feels with the company and their interactions with them."

## ***What kind of accommodations should student group stay in while in South America?***

When choosing where your group will stay, it's important to keep a few factors in mind. Depending on your group, some factors may be more important than others. For example: location and proximity to activities, price, room types and sizes or youth hostels vs. hotels, or volunteer housing.

**Hotels** *More expensive. Private rooms, full amenities, around the clock hotel staff. Typically 2/3 students to a room.*

Browse South American hotels here: <http://www.tripadvisor.ca/Hotels-g4-South-America-Hotels.html>

**Hostels** *Cheaper. Can request private rooms for the school group. Anywhere from 2-8 students in a room, often with a bunk bed setup. May have private bathrooms, or shared bathrooms on the floor. Youth hostels can range greatly, from very basic to high quality hotel type accommodations.*

Browse South American hostels, here: <http://www.hostelworld.com/hostels/South-America>

**Volunteer Housing** *Many School groups visiting South America plan to include an aspect of community service or a cultural exchange. During these legs of the tours, your school group could be staying a wide range of accommodations, from a ranch or farm, to homestays with local families. Therefore, quality of accommodations will vary greatly.*



### ***What are the best student-friendly restaurants in South America?***

The most important thing when deciding on a restaurant for your student group is making sure the venue can accommodate a large number of people. There should be plenty of options for students to choose from. Ensure the restaurant knows about any allergies or dietary restrictions your students may have. For large groups, it is best to reserve well in advance and not leave it until the night of. Breakfast is often included at hotels, and a light breakfast at hostels. This will vary, so ensure to check with your accommodation when booking. For lunch, we recommend giving students free time in a popular area with many options to choose from.

### ***What kind of transportation should we take while in South America?***

The best combination of transportation for your student trip to South America will depend on a number of factors, such as number of destination cities, distance apart, budget, group size etc.

#### ***Plane***

Of course, you will be initially travelling to South America on a southbound flight. If you are planning on visiting multiple cities over a long distance, flying is the fastest option and allows the most time to spend in each destination. However, this is the more expensive option. Remember, you will have to arrange inner city transportation as well.

#### ***Private Coach Bus***

The most popular option for student groups who plan on visiting multiple cities is renting a coach bus. This is the most economical method for large groups, and you can rent the coach for the duration of the tour to use for transportation between cities as well as within cities between activities. Coach buses and their amenities will depend on the company, your group size, budget and more.



### *Can my student group use Public Transport in South America?*

Public transit networks in South America are much less extensive, developed, or frequent as their counterparts in North America or Europe. The most common form of public transportation in South America is bus travel and train networks are almost nonexistent except for in the largest cities. The quality of bus travel varies enormously depending on the route, region, and country. It is not recommended to rely on public transport for moving your student group, especially in more rural areas. Rather, rent a coach bus or van and ensure you have a local driver you knows the region well.

For a list of charter bus companies throughout South America, visit <http://buscharter.org/companies>

### *Should we purchase Travel Insurance?*

Purchasing the correct travel insurance can help in the event someone becomes sick or injured before, or during, a trip. Most travel insurance providers' coverage includes cancellation, trip interruption, and lost baggage. If families purchase travel insurance and the student falls ill before the trip, they may receive reimbursement for costs paid towards the trip. You can either order insurance for everyone in the group and include this in the trip cost, or provide it as an optional addition to families who would like to purchase.

### *Visa and Entry requirements*

Many countries around the world have visa requirements and other restrictions on traveling. Before you travel, it is important to do your research. Some countries it may take up to 3 months to get a travel visa, so make sure you check out requirements as soon as you've selected your destination(s)!

Here are a couple of great resources on entry requirements for countries around the world:

**Visa HQ:** <https://www.visahq.ca/>

Select your country of citizenship and then the site will update the country list with requirements for your citizenship. Make sure you click on the country/countries you're visiting to get complete information (such as passport validity requirements).

**Project Visa:** <http://www.projectvisa.com/>

Simply select the country you're traveling to and then read the information provided.

### *Vaccinations*

Depending on the area you're traveling to it may be wise to get vaccinated against disease.

One of the best resources for health-related information and vaccination advice for travelers is the **Centre for Disease Control (CDC) website**. Their site gives country and region-specific information for travelers like common diseases, recommended vaccinations and tips on preventing common travelling illness. For the best and most-up-to date information, we recommend you visit a local travel clinic and speak to a doctor about your specific trip details like the areas you are going to and the type of traveling you're doing.



## *Your Next Steps to Making this Dream Student Trip a Reality!*

1. Deciding on working with a tour company, or commit to organizing the trip on your own
2. Promote the trip!
  - o Send letter home to parents, make announcements, tell you colleagues, put up posters (available from Evolve Tours) and think creatively to get the word out!
3. Hold a Parent information night
4. Distribute a Registration package to students- Waivers, Packing lists, other forms
5. Decide on a payment schedule
6. Collect deposits, registration package and payments
7. Complete rooming lists and other lists
8. Finally, board the bus or train and get the show on the road!





## *Evolve Tours*

At Evolve Tours, we've been running student trips around the world since 2006 and have been perfecting the trip planning process ever since. After deciding you want your students to experience educational travel, there's a lot involved in organizing a trip before hopping on that bus. There's the logistics of accommodations, transportation, meals, activities and more- when planned properly they come together to ensure an incredible and memorable student trip.

If you have any questions about any of the content in this guide, please email us at [info@evolvetours.com](mailto:info@evolvetours.com), or call us at 1.888.222.5066 (Toll Free)

You can also check out sample itineraries of our trips online at [www.evolvetours.com](http://www.evolvetours.com)

We'd be happy to work together to plan your student trip, or just talk travel!

Happy Travels!

Evolve Tours

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