



Creating a Community around Travel

Alumni connections can be a powerful motivator – and innovator – of international opportunities. It's especially true in the context of a world where travel is expected for a well-educated person and collaborative efforts take place half-way around the globe. Beginning about 50 years ago, a few universities began to offer trips that fit the educational mission of the university while generating some additional support for other alumni relation efforts. Today opportunities for alumni engagement and travel have expanded to a range of new programs that encourage alumni to follow their passions by traveling with others who share an interest – or an affinity - for a particular activity. The affinity travel experience can create a community for those who share the overlapping interests. Or, an affinity based community can choose to travel and form tighter bonds for having shared an intense experience.

Yale Educational Travel (www.yaleedtravel.org), part of the Association of Yale Alumni (AYA) offers a range of affinity or educational travel that includes adventure tours, family tours, photography tours, theater tours, and various cruises. Smaller alumni groups also do this. Recently, the Yale Club of Washington, organized a successful lecture tour of the Civil War Battlefield at Gettysburg, as a fundraiser: www.yaleedtravel.org/programs/10153.

It is more than the destination, the theme, or the purpose – it's the package. Packaging the journey is necessary to create community, but not sufficient. Compare en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Package_tour.

A key piece of a successful tour package is the social interaction. The consumer who buys a package gives up flexibility and customization for *convenience, value* (perhaps cost savings or special access), assured *quality and responsibility – and perhaps primarily for social interaction*. Consumers seek others with sufficient affinities to have good dinner and touring conversations during the trip. This is why affinity travel is so successful.

Community requires continuity, and ownership. To be a community – especially a community of volunteers – rather than just a participant in a trip, a significant number of the travelers must feel ownership of the journey and will often become the most frequent participants. The strongest community is created when some of the travelers are also volunteers as they help plan, organize, and administer the travel. Community members may have different roles: tourist, traveler, guide, or leader - a community requires all four. Here is the concept adapted from The 3 Stages of the Volunteer: www.realizedworth.com/2012/05/3-stages-of-volunteer-what-they-need.html which uses these terms metaphorically rather than literally as done here:

Tourist: They are first here to enjoy the ride, and can be given specific tasks, and shown how to do them. A majority of participants in the travel activity may be tourists ready to appreciate the sense of community and, perhaps, become more engaged. *Use the techniques of volunteer engagement* including support and thanks. (See handouts.)

Traveler: They know what to do, but need permission to do it. They may be ready to take on responsibility, but will do it their own way. Don't burn them out or give them tasks beyond them. As your potential future leaders it is worth investing extra effort to manage them. *Use the techniques of cultivating leadership*. (See handouts.) Follow up and thank them.

Guide: These leaders can be trusted to run parts or all of the program thanks to their talent and experience.

Leader: They are ready to take the lead in designing a new program either within the existing framework or a variation or new concept. The organization needs creative people like this – and they need the support of all the other participants.

Travel communities can be organized from the top down or the bottom up.

Yale Alumni Chorus (<http://alumninet.yale.edu/sigs/yac/aboutus.html>) was organized by volunteers from the bottom up. They wanted to sing with other Yalies and give concerts around the world.

Yale Alumni Service Corps (yaleservicecorps.org) was initially organized by AYA from the top down, but has since become a self-governing community engaged in providing service in underserved communities around the world.

Successful affinity-based travel can form the basis of a community. Whether performance-based (e.g. singing), sports-based (e.g. skiing, golfing, biking), service-based, adventure-based (e.g. bird watching) or otherwise – if the alumni collectivity (or market) is large enough, a community can be built by giving them ownership. For more on affinity and shared interest groups see overviews and handouts.