



Edu tour:

a grand learning experience for youngsters

In search of the roots of Western civilization, young European nobility took Grand Tours throughout the 17th and 19th centuries. Accompanied by learned tutors, they travelled across Europe for months, appreciating art in museums and galleries, undertaking lessons in foreign languages, and riding as well as other pursuits. In short, the Grand Tour was an education rite of passage for the aristocracy. Three hundred years later, the concept of a study tour has taken on a new face.

Exploring off the beaten track

In 2006 and 2007, Andrew Cheung undertook several significant experiments. As well as taking his own family and friends along, he once brought several German families for a biking tour in the Fujian Hakka Village in China. He took the participants to see ancestral halls, traditional versus Hakka architecture, and footsteps of domestic and overseas migration in Chinese history. These unique tours combined world-class heritage sites, proprietary pedagogic materials, and interactive discussion with an aim towards broadening the travellers' perspective of the culture that they visited. The test-runs received encouraging feedback, and soon, Edu Tour was born.





Sowing the seeds of worldvision

A passion to discover and inquire is just what makes youngsters grow and excel, which is also the corner stone of life-long learning. With this in mind, he shifted his primary target from families to students.

The traditional Chinese saying "travelling ten thousand miles is more rewarding than reading ten thousand scrolls", is particularly valid today, as knowledge outside of the classroom can be more vividly assimilated by students. To Andrew's delight, new school curriculum such as liberal studies and multi-intelligence education, the principle of learning subjects in their relationship to a wider context of life, has become a guiding concept in Hong Kong education. His 'learning on the road' Edu Tour has earned favourable reviews from local and international schools with four programmes having now been developed to fit the primary and secondary curriculum. These being North Shaanxi-Xi'an, West Fujian-Quanzhou, Singapore-Malacca and Austria-Germany.

A journey of self-exploration

Athletic and lively, Andrew Cheung could easily pass for a mature version of a Boy Scout leader. But the career path he chose was never intended to be in education or tourism.

He called himself a typical science student. Graduating from the University of Hong Kong in the early 80's, he joined the Electrical & Mechanical Services Department as an Engineer Trainee. Having spent 2 years checking government facilities, he realized that the civil service work ethic was not his cup of tea.

In 1985, he left the Government to explore China's trade, a less popular territory at the time. It was the dawn of China's open door policy when government owned enterprises were struggling to get modernized. As an engineer, Andrew would represent European manufacturers to negotiate industrial production line deals with the Chinese. During those times, very often, local factory chiefs would ask such simple favours of Andrew as to allow them to use the hot water shower in his hotel room due to the fact that they'd never experienced such a thing. Having an engineer's mind, he felt great inner conflict concerning this stark contrast, whereby such backwardness and poverty could exist while China's cultural heritage was otherwise very rich and diverse.

Yearning for something more than technical knowledge, Andrew decided to return to the classroom. He enrolled in INSEAD, one of the world's most elite business schools located in Fontainebleau, a satellite city of Paris. By diligently studying elementary French, he passed the pre-requisite, and eventually finished his MBA, achieving one of his dreams.





Before starting Edu Tour, he spent six years working as fund manager in a private equity firm. Unlike investing in the stock market, private equity investment involved many more years of holding of an investee company. IPO, or selling the investee company to an industrial player, is the usual way of exiting from an investment. The challenge lay in the in-depth risk/opportunity assessment of the acquisition target and the market it serves, deal making, as well as the ability to add value to the management team.

As far as operational experience is concerned, Andrew has plenty under his belt. For five years, he worked in the German headquarters of a multinational environmental group. One example of the group's companies is a garbage bin manufacturer. In order to introduce a new household waste collection system involving the garbage bins it produced, this company would buy up waste disposal service providers, ensure compatibility with garbage truck manufacturers, and help with the community's garbage disposal logistics planning. As a result, the garbage bin became a national standard in Germany. The humble, plastic bins even made their way to municipalities all over the world, including Hong Kong and China, making it a highly successful global product. The key to success, Andrew learned, was the power of problem-solving and innovation.



Progress through awareness

While living in Europe, Andrew Cheung was impressed by people, who in general, had a good knowledge of their own history and culture, while also showing interest in other cultures, especially China's. He wondered why, in modern times, the Chinese seemed to lack this kind of general humanity interest, not to mention such a well-structured, problem-solving mentality. To satisfy his curiosity, he began to study history.

China has been a gigantic, yet unified empire in which policies were issued by the central government, and followed by all provinces. It gave rise to a conservative conformist society, a culture of 'jumping on the band wagon'. In decentralized feudal societies of much smaller scale, like the Germans once had, there was room for individuality and independent thinking due to the fact that people had more ownership in shaping their own community's destiny. Thus, a culture of pioneers and reasoning ruled and through to the 18th century, western nations replaced China at the forefront of humanity development. The European maritime superpowers also grasped their chance to colonize the more ignorant communities and therefore, dominated the world trade.

History has a lot to tell. The rise and fall throughout the dynasties; what it took to win, and what brought about loss, actually resembled corporate cycles as demonstrated in the case studies in business school. Andrew was convinced that an integrated approach to education, one which helps students to enquire about the world around them, while drawing their attention to the inter-relationship between relevant subjects, should begin as early as primary and secondary school. Andrew came up with the idea of a unique overseas learning-on-the-road trip for children.

From China to the world

Edu Tour programmes originate from Xi'an, the centre of classic Chinese civilization. Terra Cotta Warriors, the beginning of the Silk Road, geological wonders of the Loess Plateau, ever-present cave dwelling along the Yellow River, as well as advanced agricultural research are all found in the Shaanxi Province. Site visits are combined with pedagogic elements, such as games and workshops, which add fun and inspiration to the overall learning experience.

In Fujian, there is the world renowned Hakka Village, a treasure trove of integrated humanities learning. UNESCO also calls the city a 'World Museum of Religion' due to the fact that it hosted every major religion, from Nestorian Christianity, to Hindu, as well as Islam. The trip aims to promote cultural awareness and also gives school children a glimpse of the first peaceful maritime encounters of the world, prior to the more aggressive Age of Discovery.

Singapore, a cultural melting pot featuring overseas Chinese, Malays, Indians and a British colonial influence, presents students with exposure to multi-racial societies, religious freedom, fusion cuisine, colonialism, environmental, as well as heritage conservation issues. Learning is gained through well-organized activities including on-site treasure hunts, visits, and shopping in the market. "I just play the role of a director, cueing the right person, or heritage site, to appear at the right time," says Andrew. He believes that the sense of purpose, exploration and achievement instilled in youngsters, will fuel in them a lasting passion for learning.

The finale of the Edu Tour 4-part series is Austria-

Germany. German culture is chosen due to the fact that its historic background posts a sharp contrast to China's culture. Germany, being a unified sovereign state, was formed less than 200 years ago. Prior to that, there were numerous states evidenced by the castles and palaces dotted all over the nation. Great thinkers in Germany have made significant impact on world history: the Reformation, Enlightened absolutism, classical music, Marxism, scientific discoveries, applied technology, and the present day leading edge environmental policy. Students are given access into local family homes, in order to gain first hand experience of this Western culture.

The Future of Edu Tour

Andrew's master plan for Edu Tour is impressive. How he sorts out the logistics, connections and educational aspects, must be a formidable feat. Smiling, he credits his wife, who honed his organizational skills whenever the family went on an overseas vacation. "Practice makes perfect," he says. Andrew admitted that, in fact, the biggest challenge is how to convey to school headmasters, the difference between Edu Tour and ordinary study tours. As long as he has the chance to explain everything face to face, he readily wins their trust.

The outlook for Edu Tour? Family groups are always welcome, according to Andrew. Though, for now, Europeans and Americans are not used to short-stay Asian travel, this may change in time. The good news is, he has started receiving enquiries from overseas schools. Also, China could prove to be a huge market as well. Rome was not built in a day. The long journey has just begun for Edu Tour. ☛



Andrew Cheung's choices

Favourite books: Biographies and The Economist.

Most admired leaders: Mao Ze Dong and Lee Kuan Yew, both of whom endeavoured to bring new beliefs and attitudes to the Chinese; President Roosevelt, who took the US out of neutrality and reshuffled world order.

Most significant modern invention: The Flush Toilet, Internet.

Most memorable destination: The complexity of Israel.

Most missed thing in Hong Kong when abroad: Nothing. Enjoy whatever, wherever.

Edu Tour website: www.ChinaEducationalService.com

