

Coordinate a Successful Field Trip

by Shay Seaborne

Sometimes, the hardest part about planning a field trip is deciding where to go. In which businesses, parks, historical sites and museums have your children expressed an interest in learning more? Your own children's interests are very good reason to initiate a field trip. Having a group to visit will often gain you access to places that would not normally welcome individual families. As homeschooling has gained in popularity, it is not uncommon for a field trip host to be happy to hear from homeschoolers; they've had very positive interactions with homeschooled children before. Most public places and larger businesses are used to group programs and tours, and many smaller businesses are open to them-but may need some ideas about what to present.

Regular Tours: some places are used to school tours, and are surprised by the idea of making a presentation to an audience consisting of people from a wide variety of ages. It can be helpful to reassure them that they can speak to a fairly high level; the older kids will understand, the middle children might ask for more information to help them understand; while the littlest ones will absorb...whatever-and that's OK. It is a good idea to tactfully remind the host they can change their presentation at any point.

Special Tours: other places have never been asked to give group tours before, but are very interested in the idea. They may need suggestions on what might interest the children, and how to present. For such situations, it helps to know about the company's operation beforehand. Perhaps a short, individual visit would be a good starting point. From there:

- 1) Find out what restrictions apply. Is there a group size limit; age range; student-to-parent ratio; days and times? Is there a fee? Is photography allowed? Ask for directions, to provide to attendees.
- 2) Set a date, and ask for suggestions to prepare the children for the visit. A book list or web site list is nice!
- 3) Start publicizing. Your local list is the place to post a message if you want only your members to join your event. For a wider audience and larger response, post to a regional or statewide homeschool discussion list--which you can find through www.Yahogroups.com.
- 4) Keep track of respondents. You'll want their names, number and ages of children attending, and contact information (phone and/or E-mail). It might be easiest to create a temporary file in your E-mail program, and place all responses there.
- 5) If the site requires a deposit, fee in advance or paid reservations, collect the money for each family as they register. This can save you a big headache later on! If a family cannot attend for whatever reason, tell them they are responsible for "selling" their slot if they want to recoup their money. Of course, it is appropriate to help out with this if you can.
- 6) If possible, recommend books or web sites for the families to utilize in preparing for their field trip.
- 7) It can't hurt to send out a reminder the day before, and include a short memo about appropriate conduct. Remember to include directions and any rules, such as a prohibition against photographs.
- 8) Confirm with the host site as needed.

9) Bring a blank Thank You note or card with you to the field trip. This may be the only time you have these particular people together in one place! Encourage group members to sign the note before leaving the premises. Note who has taken photos, and ask for their phone numbers, so you can obtain a photo to send with the note.

10) Be sure to verbally thank the field trip host before leaving the site. They will appreciate it if you can say some specific things about what you enjoyed.

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