



Where There Be Dragons

THE LEADER IN CROSS-CULTURAL + EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION SINCE 1993

About Dragons

MAPMAKERS ONCE DREW DRAGONS TO REPRESENT LANDS UNKNOWN.
BOLD EXPLORERS WHO VENTURED BEYOND THE MAP'S EDGE WERE SAID TO GO
"WHERE THERE BE DRAGONS"

Since 1993, Dragons has pioneered expertly led, comprehensive travel experiences for high school, college, and adult participants. On course, we learn by doing. We travel like locals, live with families, apprentice with artists, and learn from scholars, sages, and community leaders. We access phenomenal beauty, engage deeply with local communities, and ignite our own curiosity.

We believe that the experience of living in the world and connecting with an unfamiliar culture has something to teach everyone. We are dedicated to cross-cultural education because we believe that future leaders will be required to think beyond borders when considering the implications of resource scarcity on a global community. Our courses are designed to help develop the self-awareness and cross-cultural competencies to be active participants in this conversation. We see exceptional beauty in diversity and believe that the health of the planet can only be optimized when individual citizens are internally motivated to care for a global community. We can't predict exactly what skills will be needed to succeed in the future, but we're willing to hedge our bets that a foreign language, well-worn passport, and healthy dose of empathy will serve our world well.

History

Our guiding pedagogy was originally formed in response to travel limitations in China. In 1992-93, when Dragons built its first programs, the Chinese government imposed numerous restrictions on visiting student groups making it difficult to go beyond a tightly curated and contrived experience. In pursuit of the intimate and authentic, we thought it necessary to travel beyond the tourist zones, to visit ethnic minority areas in the countryside, and open ourselves to meeting with intellectuals, artists, and activists in unscripted spaces. To access these sources of learning we traveled in small numbers with a high instructor-to-student ratio allowing us to move beyond government limitations as a band of independent travelers. The young academics we first hired possessed years of country-knowledge and specialized language skills, allowing them to mentor participants through nuanced cultural interactions and provide expert context. From those first programs we developed a training curriculum, assessment practices, and management structures to build our community of exceptional Dragons instructors.

Over the past twenty-five years, we have expanded our operations to over twenty countries. The history of Dragons is one of continually innovative programming in lesser visited parts of the developing world: no two Dragons programs are the same. We have developed extensive training to support innovation in international programs, from trainings in risk management and emergency response; to trainings in leadership, conflict-resolution and team-building; to trainings in developmental psychology and the adolescent mind. We have honed our curriculum to enable our instructors to best teach to global citizenship, self-awareness, and leadership through traditional didactic modalities as well as carefully built and tested modalities of cross-cultural experiential education.

What Sets Dragons Apart

We travel in small groups. A Dragons group typically consists of no more than 12 participants and 3 instructors. A 4:1 participant-to-instructor ratio ensures that each participant receives individual mentorship and appropriate challenges. Small groups allow us to create dynamic and flexible course itineraries.

We hire experts. Dragons instructor teams include an average of 4-12 years of in-country experience, communicate in local dialects, and bring cultural fluency to each program. When not guiding with Dragons, our instructors are typically graduate students, returned Peace Corps Volunteers, U.N. development professionals, veteran guides, and career teachers - all of whom share a passion for fostering humble and authentic cultural exchange.

We embrace the power of experiential education. By closely observing and engaging with local communities, we begin to ask questions about new cultural traditions, governance systems, religious beliefs, and human rights; we also ask reflective questions about who we are, where we come from, and how we'd like to live as empowered members of a global community. We employ experiential education to address the question, "who am I and why do I matter," while embracing a leadership model of leading-from-behind, such that participants are encouraged to be self-directed leaders.

We understand that change doesn't happen overnight. The process of knowing a place, and knowing ourselves within that place, takes time and we ask our participants to commit to the process of slowing down, feeling uncomfortable, and digging deep enough to become wiser about the world and themselves.

We foster responsible travel. Dragons defines responsible travel as travel that is culturally conscious, environmentally responsible, and focused on developing meaningful connections and mutual respect with local communities. Over the course of Dragons 25-year history, we have cultivated longstanding relationships with respected community leaders, academics, social entrepreneurs, and professionals involved in a diversity of fields.

We promote a paradigm shift from "volunteering" to "learning service." Dragons service program component promotes a holistic experience that combines a study of effective development, a long-term sustainability assessment, and coordination with an established community-driven project. We acknowledge that while we strive to leave a positive mark in communities, it is often ourselves that undergo the most profound learning and transformation through authentic engagement and an exchange of culture.

Core Values

Profound travel experiences often provide a strong mirror for the lives we live at home. Dragons instructors guide reflective conversations, helping participants to better understand themselves and to realize their full potential. Dragons core values are at the center of this self-discovery process and integrated into daily life on course. Whether participants are asked to book bus tickets for the group or translate from Spanish to English during a speaker presentation, participants are offered daily opportunities to develop new skills and strengthen their abilities as leaders and global citizens.

On course, participants build critical skills in:

Global Citizenship: Connecting across cultures to discover the world, and a place within it.

Self-Awareness: Asking questions to learn more about one's own core values.

Leadership: Finding a voice among a new group of peers. Gaining confidence as a responsible, self-reliant traveler.

What People Say

From the Founder:

“At Dragons, we don’t profess to have the answers. We do know that we become more knowledgeable, wiser and more impactful when we check our worldviews at the door, travel across borders and engage open-mindedly with people whose lives are dramatically different than our own. We know too that when people find a deep sense of purpose in the still, real moments of their lives, undistracted and supported by competent guides, they find a quiet peace in which they become sure of themselves and aware of their places in the world.” –**Chris Yager, Founder**

Participants:

“I genuinely feel I am flying home with a suitcase of new knowledge to apply in my life. I have challenged myself physically and mentally in ways that were scary to do but ultimately have enabled me to learn more about who I am as a person and what some of my capabilities and limits are.” –**Noemie Hamker, Rwanda: Development & Peace Building (Summer 2016)**

“I came here focused on improving my Spanish. However, I quickly realized that this course was not about just the Spanish language but the culture that came with it. My Spanish classes were not taught through grammar but through the exploration of the culture. The homestays were also a huge culture shock but one of the most impactful parts of this trip. I also learned much more about human rights than I was expecting. I have always been so focused on wildlife and the issues associated with the environment that I spent little time focusing on the struggles of humans. This course opened my eyes to the injustice humans face everyday at the hands of other humans.” –**Sydney Stump, Guatemala: Spanish Language Intensive (Summer 2016)**

“The repeated experience of connecting with individuals who couldn’t understand me and who I couldn’t understand beyond communicating basic needs taught me a lot about the universal qualities you can find among people as well as the nature of people.” –**Jackson Davis, China Semester: South of the Clouds (Spring 2016)**

“I would definitely consider this trip life-changing. It further sparked my curiosity for the world and I feel like I've learned not only how to be a traveler, but how to ask questions and how to talk about complicated issues. I learned about values that I didn't even think about before. All in all, I am going back home changed from this experience.” –**Nicole Haney, Indonesia Semester: Community, Culture & Conservation (Spring 2016)**

“I arrived in Cusco lost, uninspired, weak, unconfident, out of shape, and not particularly happy or excited for my future. The one thing that I had going for me was that I was able to motivate myself towards self improvement via active personal challenges and changes. ... I held myself to a high standard, worked really hard, and grew a lot physically, intellectually, and most importantly, emotionally. This has been the most positively transformative 3 months of my life, and for that I am seriously grateful.” –**Jack Jundanian, South America Semester: Andes & Amazon Semester (Spring 2016)**

“Some of the best most impactful and enjoyable [memories] were actually unplanned or even unintended. They just happened on the road or were bumps along that road, and those are probably the ones which leave the biggest impressions, which I’m looking forward to continue to learning from as I look back at them with different eyes.” –**Robert Burns, China Semester: South of the Clouds (Spring 2016)**

“Take it on yourself to see all the amazing and rich culture that Nepal has to offer. Take as little time to rest as you can for there is too much to see and not enough time. ... three months is a blink of an eye to see thousands of years of history involving almost 100 different ethnic groups, different religions, and extremely different ways of living than those that you are used to.” –**Benjamin Mertz, Nepal Semester: Himalayan Studies (Spring 2016)**

“The most impactful moments: the homestays. Each place we went to and family I stayed with showed me something about life. Swimming with dolphins in The Bandas. Spearfishing in Sampela, playing soccer in Langa, playing gamelan in Java. There were so many impactful and enjoyable activities. This semester program is INCREDIBLE. The instructors are amazing inspirational people. Period.” –**William Dufault, Indonesia Semester: Community, Culture & Conservation (Spring 2016)**

Parents:

"We adore Dragons. We think it's the finest program of its kind in the field. We are so impressed with the incredible planning, the attention, the quality of leadership, the entire message of global citizenship." –**Parents of Fiona Fischer, Nepal Semester: Himalayan Studies (Spring 2016)**

"The program has taken what my daughter had as background due to her cultural heritage and put it front and center in her life in a way that has made her appreciate herself and her world in a way that she did not before. It is incredible that she was able to learn a new language and actually realize that learning languages is something she wants to pursue in her life. That is certainly a huge strength of the program. The diversity of experience as well as the opportunities for reflection seem to have been many. From my conversations with her it is clear that they were invaluable to what Yasmeen was able to capture from this experience." –**Parent of Yasmeen Haider, Indonesia Semester: Community, Culture & Conservation (Spring 2016)**

"Dragons strength: The authenticity of where you go, what you choose to do and see, where you stay and how the participants are involved along the way. You do not just lead them by their hand and guide them, you let them figure things out, and think about where they are and what there is to do." –**Parents of Nitsa Platis, Mekong Semester: Life Along the River (Fall 2015)**

Partners:

"Dragons demonstrates, at every level, a profound commitment to creating the very best student experience abroad. The caliber of their on-site staff, their tireless attention to risk management, and their truly innovative approach to experiential learning make them a valued program partner." –**John Luria, Director of the Bridge Year Program at Princeton University**

Through a comprehensive vetting process, Dragons was selected as one of three partner organizations to work with Princeton University in customizing and launching an inaugural Bridge Year Program. By 2015, Dragons was chosen as Princeton's exclusive partner of Bridge Year programming and currently manages five nine-month Bridge Year programs in India, China, Senegal, Bolivia and Brazil.

"We have worked with Dragons since 2006... The Dragons instructors and facilitators provide a complementary role by bringing experiential pedagogy to help students reflect and process their experiences, as well as solid training in risk management and a depth of experience on the ground. From what I've seen, Dragons instructors have a balanced skill-set and a knack for connecting with students, and working well in dynamic leadership teams." –**Helena Kaufman, Director of Off-Campus Studies at Carleton College - Northfield, MN**

Dragons has worked with Carleton College since 2006 on program development and execution as well as faculty workshops and professional development for staff.

"Dragons' reputation is well deserved. Their efforts have been vital to the success of our global travel programs, and through their expertise, professionalism, and good will they have helped us immeasurably to customize and execute travel experiences that integrate and advance our school's vision and values. Dragons is a great partner—visionary, professional, generous, and in this work for the right reason." –**Peter Brown, Director of Global Education at Menlo School - Atherton, CA**

Dragons has worked with the Menlo School since 2014 to deepen and enhance their global programming by offering longer, more challenging and growth oriented programming for students. Dragons supports Menlo Abroad's continuing evolution by providing regular consulting and support for risk management and outward messaging, on-campus tone-setting and pre-course preparation, annual teacher training workshops, site visits and scouting, as well as collaborative program development in Guatemala and China.

Facts & Stats

A few facts and stats:

25 Year history of working with over 6,000 participants in remote areas of developing countries

Extensive experience training and supporting over 900 diverse professional field instructors

Risk Management experience spanning 250,000 student-days in the field

22 years of collaboration with schools and universities to provide customized programming

Recent Partnerships include: Princeton University, Carleton College, Phillips-Exeter Academy, Hawken School, Norfolk Academy, Castilleja, Archer School for Girls, Nueva School, Hathaway-Brown, Thacher School, Lawrenceville, Collegiate School

Sponsors at least 30 days annually of professional training and orientation for teachers and instructors in skills related to working with students overseas including Risk Management, Student Engagement, Leadership and Team building, and Experiential Education

Research shows that students who take a Gap Year graduate with higher GPAs than their peers and are more satisfied with their careers. This advantage held when controlling for socioeconomic background or academic performance in high school. Clagett, 2011. (<https://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/27/clagett-gap-year>)

Dragons currently operates in the following countries:

China, since 1993

Thailand, since 1993

India, since 1994

Nepal, since 1994

Laos, since 1998

Guatemala, since 2003

Peru, since 2003

Bolivia, since 2005

Cambodia, since 2005

Senegal, since 2005

Morocco, since 2007

Rwanda, since 2009

Brazil, since 2009

Indonesia, since 2010

Jordan, since 2010

Nicaragua, since 2010

Burma, since 2011

Madagascar, since 2015

Panama, since 2016

Social Media

Website: www.wheretherebedragons.com

Student In-Field Blog - Yak Board: <https://my.wheretherebedragons.com/blog/>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/wheretherebedragons

Instagram: www.instagram.com/wheretherebedragons

Twitter: twitter.com/wheretherebedragons

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Images



A Dragons student meets her homestay family in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Photo: Chloe Hall, Indonesia Summer



Learning to weave in Bolivia. Photo: Julianne Chandler, Andes & Amazon Semester

