How to Plan a Field Trip to a New York State Park or Historic Site

New York State welcomes your and your classroom to one of our many New York State Park or Historic Site or DEC Environmental Education Center. We hope this guide will help you plan a successful field trip. If at any time during the planning of your field trip experience you have questions, please contact the staff at the site your class will be visiting.

PLANNING YOUR FIELD TRIP PROGRAM

Field trips enhance classroom learning, provide learning experiences that are different from the classroom, and give students opportunities for personal growth. As you start to plan your field trip, determine the trip objectives. What are you looking for the students to learn and experience?

Once you determine the trip objectives, start planning your field trip location by searching the New York State Parks website at nysparks.com, where you will find a map of State Park Nature Centers and a listing of State Historic Sites, and links to DEC nature centers and fish hatcheries, and other field trip destinations.

Choose a Date
When choosing your dates, think about what time of year you would like to make your visit. Most teachers like to plan field trips in the spring, between mid-April and mid-June. The weather in the spring can make for a great field trip, but can sometimes conflict with testing and other activities. Early fall can also be a popular time to book trips. Plan early to make sure you get the dates you want for your group.

Consider booking your field trip in the late fall, winter or early spring. If your program is not specific to the weather or the season, you may have more flexibility than in more popular months. Many of our sites hold wonders worth beholding in these months.

Once you have found a place to visit, contact the site directly to schedule your visit.

Visit the Site
Acquaint yourself with the place your class is going to visit:
1. How long does it actually take to get from your school to the field trip location?
2. Locate the bus parking area, rest rooms and lunch spot for your class.
3. Hike the trails or tour the buildings.
4. Note the location of poison ivy and other hazardous plants in the park.
5. If possible, introduce yourself to the education staff.

Be Prepared
1. Follow the school's procedures for:
   a. Administrative approval of the trip
   b. Organizing bus and food services
   c. Permission slips
   d. Communicating with school and chaperones
   e. Emergency procedures
2. Create a schedule for the day
   a. School departure time
   b. Arrival time at field trip destination
   c. Program time
   d. Lunch
   e. Load buses to return to school
   f. Arrival back at school
3. List the learning objectives and Learning Standards for the trip.
4. Make a list of all the equipment needed for the trip including trash bags and a first aid kit.
5. Many parks have gift shops. Decide whether the students will be allowed to shop in the gift shop and how much money they should bring to spend in the shop.
PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS
The best way to ensure that your students will get the most out of your class’ field trip is to prepare everyone involved so they are comfortable with what might be a new experience. For some students, this may be their first trip to undeveloped natural areas. Here are some suggestions for how best to prepare for their special day.

Pre-Visit Activities
There are several ways to get your students ready for the content that they will be learning during their program. One way is to find out whether the place your class will be visiting has pre-visit materials that complement the program the class will be experiencing.

If pre-visit materials are not available, activities that incorporate observation of their surroundings can enhance their experience on the trip and help them become accustomed to seeing the natural world around them. For example, try a mini “adventure walks” around the schoolyard or even in the classroom with pictures of different plants and animals posted in a collage. If you have time, allowing students to journal the changes they see (you can add or take away pictures) can add both learning standard components and a level of connection for the student to what they may experience on the trip.

Another way is to dedicate class time to learning about the park and the history of the park. Start at nysparks.com and read the park history and look at the park maps; use the park map to show your students where the field trip will occur. If the park has a virtual tour show this to the students to help them learn about the site. Use the maps in either Google or Bing to show students a street view of the park and look for images of the field trip site online.

Talk with your students about what they will be doing during their field trip, from when they board the bus at school to head out to their destination to when they return. Let them know the field trip schedule and any activities they will be doing. This will help enhance their experience and help them grasp what they will be doing and learning.

“Leave No Trace”
Discuss Leave No Trace principals with your students:

i) Plan ahead and prepare:
   i) Ask the students to research the regulations and any special concerns for the place they will be visiting,

ii) Travel on established trails to protect the park’s natural resources and avoid ticks and poison ivy.

iii) Dispose of trash properly; check that no trash or spilled food is left. Watch this video on how long trash remains in the environment.

iv) Leave what you find, including rocks, plants, animals, and other natural objects.

v) Respect wildlife: watch wildlife from a distance. Do not follow, approach or chase wildlife.

vi) Be considerate of other visitors to the site and protect the quality of their experience.

Poison Ivy – Leaves of three
Poison ivy can be found along the border between fields and forests, along trails and roads and growing up trees and along stone walls. A cluster of three shiny green leaves easily identifies plants. Older plants have hairy stems.

Let them be

Clothing
During the field trip, the class will spend a large portion of the day outside. Students and chaperones should dress for the weather and be prepared to get dirty. They should wear
flat, closed-toe shoes (like sneakers), regardless of the weather. Crocs should not be worn if the weather report calls for rain or snow, everyone should come prepared for wet and muddy feet. If your program takes place on or near a body of water, your students might get muddy or wet feet even on the sunniest day. A hat with a brim helps to keep the sun off students’ faces. And remind the students to put on sunscreen before you leave school.

**Field Trip Rules**
Draft ‘field trip rules’ (student behavior rules) and review these rules with your students one week before to the trip and the day before the trip. If you work with older students, consider making a behavior contract that each student signs.

The presence of electronics and cell phones can help chronical a student’s experience, but can also be a distraction. Ensure guidelines are set, within your district’s policy, and discussed with the park interpreter prior to the field trip.

**Addressing Fears**
You may find that some students have a fear of being in “wild” places. Some of the most common fears include insects, wild animals, poisonous plants, and getting lost.

Since most of these fears are due to a lack of exposure or information, familiarize the students with basic safety precautions regarding the few harmful plants and animals, such as keeping on trails and wearing insect repellant.

By exploring the park virtually, identifying the boundaries of the park, looking at trail maps, and the knowledge that they will be with a parks interpreter, or an experienced teacher, can reassure students that they will not get lost.

**WORKING WITH CHAPERONES**
Many teachers find that one of the hardest parts of planning a field trip is recruiting chaperones. You want adults who are interested in the subject matter, who know the students, and who will put students’ needs above their own. Here are some tips for recruiting and training chaperones.

a) Confirm with both your school district and the site about the number of chaperones you will need for the trip.

b) Two and three weeks before the trip start seeking chaperones

   i) Check with your district for rules regarding chaperone recruitment. Some require a police background check before the chaperone can travel with the students.

   ii) Hand-pick chaperones from your list of engaged and interested parent volunteers. Those who already volunteer in your class know the students and are probably more available in the daytime hours.

   iii) Remember that grandparents, aunts and uncles and other close relatives are happy to spend the day with their young one when parents are unable to attend

   c) Be very honest about your expectations for the field trip. Outline the day, your
planned activities and requirements that you might have for your students and chaperones, including food, water, and clothing. Explain what their role in the field trip will be and what you expect of them. Explain your wishes regarding electronics and use of phones during the field trip.

d) If possible, schedule a meeting with all chaperones to discuss the trip and address any questions they may have.

e) Give each chaperone the field trip schedule and a site map.

Reminders for Chaperones

- Keep track of the students in the group.
- Get to know the students by asking them to introduce themselves and try to remember their names.
- They should help direct the students’ attention and ensure they are listening when the park interpreter is teaching.
- Be familiar with the locations of bathrooms and drinking fountains.
- If they are excited and interested in the program it will help make the children excited and interested too.
- Show enthusiasm, stay with the group and keep the children on task and listening are part of how they can help.
- Be sure to let the chaperones know purpose of the field trip. Ask them to review the goals of the field trip with the students at the start of the trip.
- Dress for the weather forecast because they will be spending their time outdoors.
- They should stay with their group at all times.

FIELD TRIP DAY

Arrivals
Generally, it is best to plan for buses to arrive on-site 15 minutes before the scheduled program time. This allows you and your class time to get off the bus and take care of any housekeeping issues. Staff will let you know where to meet and details about bus parking when you call to register.

Boundaries
Create boundaries for field study activities, lunch, and any free time the students will have during your trip.

Name Tags
Name tags are helpful for site staff and chaperones.

Lunches
Lunch can be a great opportunity for students to take a break from learning — sometimes lunch can be as much of an event as the actual program! Park or historic site staff can identify picnic tables, pavilions, or areas available to your group to eat and play.

Trash Free Parks
Many New York State Parks and Historic Sites have a carry-in, carryout trash policy. Check with the park staff before your visit to find out whether you will need to bring trash bags for your lunch trash so you can take it with you and dispose of it back at school.

Reminders for Students

- Stay with your group and listen to your leader.
- Stay on pathways and trails.
- Follow directions and ask questions.
- Respect the rights of other living things in the park. All of our visitors, animals and plants are important to us. They deserve the right to enjoy the day just as you are.
- No collecting

Be Flexible and Prepared
Field trips offer great opportunities for unplanned learning and teachable moments. Seize those moments and adjust the schedule accordingly.

Despite the best planning, sometimes things can go wrong. Be sure to have a backup plan in case a child needs to leave early due to illness, the weather suddenly changes, or students get very wet.
Prior to Departure
Take a few minutes before returning to school to ask the students to reflect on their field trip experience.

Thank you for helping us share New York State Parks with your students!

New York State Parks is committed to making sure that our programs are of highest educational value to teachers and students. We hope that you find this guide a helpful resource. We welcome feedback and urge you to share your thoughts about our programs.

New York State Parks

Sources


Leave No Trace, *The leave no trace seven principles*, https://lnt.org/learn/7-principles


Suggested Field Trip Clothing

DRESS LIKE ME IN:

SPRING, SUMMER, FALL

Hat

Long pants

Shoes and socks, not sandals

Old sneakers or boots, for aquatic lessons

WINTER

Hat

Scarf

Mitlens

Coat; zip it up!

Warm pants are better than skirts or jeans

Long underwear

Socks

Boots; at least ankle-high
Field Trip Checklist

What you will need before you call the park that you plan to visit:

___ Several possible dates
___ Purpose of the trip, guided program or self-directed trip; curriculum content
___ Potential numbers of students, including grade
___ Special needs or requirements from the group

What you will need to do before your visit:

___ Gather final attendance numbers
___ Arrange for funding and payment
___ Recruit and prepare chaperones, check with site about chaperone ratios
___ Send letter to parents with permission slips
___ Schedule buses
___ Prepare your class for what to expect and appropriate clothes to wear
___ Make plans for lunch location and time

Connect Kids Transportation Grants Program is administered by NYS Parks in cooperation with Governor Andrew Cuomo’s office and is funded through the NYS Environmental Protection Fund.