

# â€œA WEEK WITHOUT WALLSâ€: ISBâ€™S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Chris Scheussler June 13, 2018



**Experiential learning opportunities offer ISB students a chance to explore topics of interest in exciting locations across Asia**

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There are certain clear advantages to studying at an international school. Students are immersed in a different culture, their worldviews are expanded dramatically, and they're challenged by an engaged faculty in a rigorous academic setting. But perhaps the most exciting aspect is the opportunity to experience and explore different parts of the world. At the International School of Beijing, this kind of experience is built into the curriculum through their innovative Experiential Learning Opportunities, or ELOs.

Every school year, ISB high school students take off on a weeklong trip designed to draw upon the school's curriculum and activities. Students choose between 18 different ELO options – they range from a Surf and Service trip in the Philippines, to an Off the Beaten Path exploration of Inner Mongolia, to an examination of the plague of human trafficking in Hanoi. Students can also choose to stay in Beijing to immerse themselves in music production or culinary techniques, or shoot over to Shanghai to explore the culture through photography.

Each ELO consists of a sequenced framework designed to guide students through the subject matter. The trips consist of at least three faculty members, and for the more popular ones like Shanghai, there can be up to five.

Brian McManus, the Strategic Learning Coordinator at ISB, supervises the ELOs. He remembers being nervous on his first trip as a faculty member.

“The first trip I went on, it was to southern China and it was a camping trip with a bunch of kids. I'd come from a school in the States in Florida, and the idea of taking a big group of students camping was definitely unheard of there. But the trip was phenomenal. I got to know the kids in a way I could never have done in a classroom, and it was the same for them. It establishes a different kind of bond between us and that's invaluable when you come back to the classroom.”

## STUDENT-LED EXPLORATION

These kinds of experiential learning opportunities are essential to the educational philosophy of ISB. The school places a big emphasis on building skills that transcend traditional classroom subjects and will prepare its students for life in a rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

“The main goal of the ELOs is to get our students outside of their comfort zones,” says McManus. “We want to give them the chance to take the lead on the kinds of things they want to explore. This is a week without walls kind of experience, and it ties in directly with the kind of education we want to provide at ISB.”

“ELOs offer unique opportunities for students to engage with new places and ideas,” says David Munro, principal of ISB's high school. “Students get to choose where they go and what they learn and get to unplug from the academic rigours of life in Beijing and connect with teachers and students in a way not afforded at school. Teachers get to know students in real life contexts and connect to them while learning and exploring along side them.”

## HOW IT WORKS

Students are asked to give three ranked ELO program choices, and they are placed based on availability. ELOs are

open to all high school students at ISB, although most seniors choose to spend the week preparing for college.

Most programs are paid for by the school; however, certain programs, like Surf and Serve in the Philippines, require a supplemental fee.

Up until this year, they've been scheduled in June; however, starting in the '18-'19 school year, they'll be scheduled in September so as not to conflict with final exams and end-of-year activities.

So rather it's a week of learning sailing techniques on the coast of northern China, or building houses in rural villages through Habitat for Humanity, ELOs give students an incredible opportunity to be challenged and to engage with communities in meaningful ways.

"On our recent trip to Hiroshima Japan, we all experienced a city that was ravaged by a nuclear device and saw the hope and rejuvenation of a city that is a beacon of hope for a world peace today," says Munro. "We interviewed local citizens and tourists to find out what they felt about the impact of the dropping of the bomb and what it means to us today. Students got to hear about people's hope for world peace and de-nuclearization at a time in history when this message is most relevant. These lesson can be taught in the classroom, but what these students learned in the streets of Hiroshima will never be forgotten."

## **About International School of Beijing**

The International School of Beijing offers an academically rigorous, balanced and engaging learning environment enriched by being in China and strengthened by collaboration with parents and external partnerships. It cultivates inspirational and creative opportunities to develop each student's unique potential. It nurtures confidence and intellectual curiosity through experiential learning and innovative applications of knowledge and skills.

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