

Language travel or language tourism: have educational trips changed so much?

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This article points out the changes in organization, students and language learning that language trips, as contrasted with educational trips (of which language trips are a subgroup) have gone through in the last years. The article emphasizes the need to differentiate between language trips and language tourism based on issues of additional activities, emphasis on language and expected outcomes in order to show that although both types of language experiences have significant differences in language gains, both can be interesting for the travel agents and course organizers alike. The article begins by positioning the importance of language tourism in the world and the addresses its importance in the British economy to support the need to pay special attention to its study. Afterwards, the article will study the difference between language travel and language tourism and a tentative approach of both approaches' effect in language learning. Finally, the paper concludes that despite their similarities language trips and language tourism are aimed to different types of students and that although the language benefits of language tourism can be expected to be lower, these trips can be very for younger students. This paper can also bring some light towards the kind of customers that each type can attract, thus it can be useful for travel companies and agencies alike that need to suggest trips to their potential customers.

Keywords: Language learning; Education; language travel; effects of travel

INTRODUCTION

In a recent teacher training course in Valencia, tourism students were asked if they really knew what students enrolled in foreign language courses abroad do. Surprisingly, many said that they did not and that they never read the content of the language travel brochures that were received in the college. In fact, although some students had taken courses 6-7 years before, most of them did not consider travelling to learn a foreign language as "tourism".

The language travel market has changed significantly since the 1970s (Wissot, 1970) but the publications reflecting these changes are scarce both in foreign language education and tourism education. Of course, there is a significant research on educational travel and the effects of study trips on the students views' and experiences' towards the world. Most of these studies address issues of adult education previously included in Knowles' andragogical model (1984) such as: self-directed learning; the learner's background and its effect in succeeding in the

trip; the evolution of intrinsic motivation to learn; the interest in tasks that imply learning; and experiential learning (Roberson, 2002). Additionally, one major reason for educational travel abroad is the opportunity to learn and interact with other cultures (Byrnes, 2001).

This paper reflects the results of several studies undertaken by a language travel study group at EPS Gandía College in Valencia from 2002 to 2006. The central assumption is that there is a significant difference in summer courses abroad today between those that can be considered to follow tourism practices (language tourism) whose main goal is entertainment, and language trips aimed at learning the language. Each type has its benefits and drawbacks and, indeed, its customers with differentiating features from each other. According to Engle and Engle (2000) there is an increasing shift between longer educational stays abroad to shorter courses or sessions (2000; 2006) maybe as a "result of institutional pressure to increase study abroad numbers" (Engle and Engle, 2006: 220) or as continuous effort to make experiences abroad accessible to more students. However, there are drastic differences between long educational stays and shorter trips. As they mention:

"It is undeniable that there are fundamental differences in the academic and cultural experience offered by study abroad programs today. We consider that the creation of a level-based classification system for program types would address this situation honestly and responsibly. Compare, if you will:

- a one-month summer term, requiring little or no host language proficiency, with subject-matter classes in English, collective housing and American roommates; with
- a full-year program for students of advanced linguistic proficiency housed individually in a host family and directly enrolled in local university courses or engaged in a professional internship or service learning project." (Engle and Engle, 2000: 3).

According to this changing trend, this paper revises the following issues: 1) study abroad as a type of tourism, 2) Its impact in the international economy (and specifically in the British one), 3) Importance and differences between language travel and language tourism, 4) current issues associated to language tourism, and 5) effects in language learning. The paper concludes that the language learning of language tourism trips could be lower due to the social activity component making the trip profitable only in specific circumstances and with younger and inexperienced students.

STUDYING ABROAD

The 2 to 4 week language trip has been recommended for a long time partly because of the need of acquiring a second language (Freed, So & Lazar, 2003). and partly as a life experience or what has recently called "serious leisure"¹ In the 1960s many researchers recommended

¹"*Serious leisure* is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins, 1992, p.3)".[Retrieved from <http://www.soci.ualgary.ca/seriousleisure/MainPages/BasicConcepts.htm>].

the trip when students achieved an intermediate proficiency level in English (Lado, 1964). When learning a foreign language abroad students needed to adjust to their situation, the new culture, the influence of their reference cultural group and their own personality. In fact, Dragonas (1983) assured that summer programs serve to enhance motivation for language learning, cultural awareness, positive attitudes toward the host country, and parental and public consciousness of other cultures. Clashes in some or all of these factors may lead to the cultural crisis known as the cultural shock that is usually experienced by immigrants but can also be experienced by international students in short programs as well as tourists (Furnham, 1984). However, the adaptation that follows the difficult moment when the student's own culture clashes with the new culture allows the acculturation process or adaptation to the new culture (Lundstedt, 1963). Thus students move from the euphoria upon their arrival to culture shock to adaptation (Hofstede, 1997). However difficult, this experience is highly rewarding for most students who see in their travel abroad a necessary part of their own education (Engle and Engle, 2006).

In the early 1970s many international travel companies observed the potential of organizing summer courses. First, it was in France but, very soon, the influence of the English speaking countries in the world (United Kingdom and United States) redirected this trend towards the U.K. and the U.S. This trend has remained stable until today (Chen and Barnett, 2000; Roberson, 2002). The last years before the 1973 petrol crisis also meant an increase in the number of trips abroad in the US. At the same time, in Europe the trip abroad was limited by the cost of transportation, housing and tuition fees. However, due to the fact that the number of countries started to increase in the European Union Market (which was later replaced by the global idea of the European Union in the last decade) in which many social law and policies are common to all the member countries, the student mobility has increased considerably. Likewise, students have more flexibility to study abroad. However, although this could mean that less students would be attracted to taking regular summer courses, in fact, language requirements in the professional market in many countries have been very demanding in reference to the minimum English proficiency level, and therefore students willing to improve their English tend to take more and more courses (Engle and Engle, 2006).

IMPACT OF LANGUAGE TRAVEL IN THE ECONOMY: FROM THE WORLD TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

Summer courses as a justification for travel abroad has become clear in the last 15 years. To cope with the need of further programming, organization and figures have justified journals like the *Language Travel Magazine*. Currently, this periodical does a general status survey on language travel internationally every two or three years. According to this journal, the length of stay varies a great deal between countries. In fact, while the average student in Australia in 2003 (*Language Travel Magazine*, 2005) could spend as many as 15.6 weeks in his educational stay, some other countries usually received their foreign students for much shorter stays. For instance, in the same year Malta welcome its visitors an average of 2.8 weeks, France 3.2 weeks, Italy 4.2 weeks and Ireland or Spain for 5 weeks. Course prices

also varied accordingly, while a month in South Africa can be as low as 632 US\$, the same stay in France averaged 1132 US\$ and a month in the UK could mean 1512 US\$. By 2005, the travellers flux had slightly increased. However, prices were very different among countries with greater charges in South Africa where the average of a one month course was 847US\$ (a 34% increase) and the USA 1044US\$ (a 20.84% increase). The number of students seems to have increased also but total figures of travellers are difficult to obtain.

According to the *Language Travel Magazine*, language travel (shorter or longer) has a great impact in the British economy especially in the South and Midlands. The decreasing prices in air travel due to the competence between low budget and national airlines have facilitated the increment in the number of language travel in the last years. According to a survey done by the *Language Travel Magazine* with data obtained from 16 companies in 2003, each company had an average of about 850 students (total 12,619) and their average of stay was 10 weeks. Most students are Asian (32.5%) followed by Swiss and Spanish. Most students are between 19 and 24 years old. The average expense for housing is about 140£ per week and tuition about 220£ a week. Students also spend important amounts of money in food, entertainment, excursions, personal trips, books and more. In total, most students staying for about two months would probably spend between 2,000 and 3,000£. These numbers are only indicative because it is well know that most companies keep this information secretly but it is commonly believed that the total number of students could be in excess of 150,000 a year. Thus the impact is very significant. Additionally, a recent report by JWT Education for the Association of Language Travel Organizations (ALTO) suggested that language travel, especially 3-4 weeks courses and the total number of students, will have a sustained increment in the next years while longer courses will be reduced (p.11-12). This global trend places Japan as the first emitting country followed by Germany, the USA, Spain, Brazil, France, Italy and South Korea. Host countries, according to ALTO's Associates are: UK, Spain, France, US, Canada, Australia, Ireland, Malta and Italy. Although, as it is mentioned in the report " It should be noted that these findings are most likely to be dependent on where agents are located and in this study most participants were from Western Europe" (p. 9).

IMPORTANCE AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LANGUAGE TOURISM AND LANGUAGE TRAVEL²

There is little question on whether this large quantity of foreign students require special services different from other students or general travellers. In order to approach this issue, it is necessary to see what kinds of services are related to the organization of summer courses. In general, we should address this issue from a number of different perspectives (see diagram 1)

²In general, this article refer to Language travel as that whose main goal is academic while Language tourism is a combination of academic and entertainment aspects.

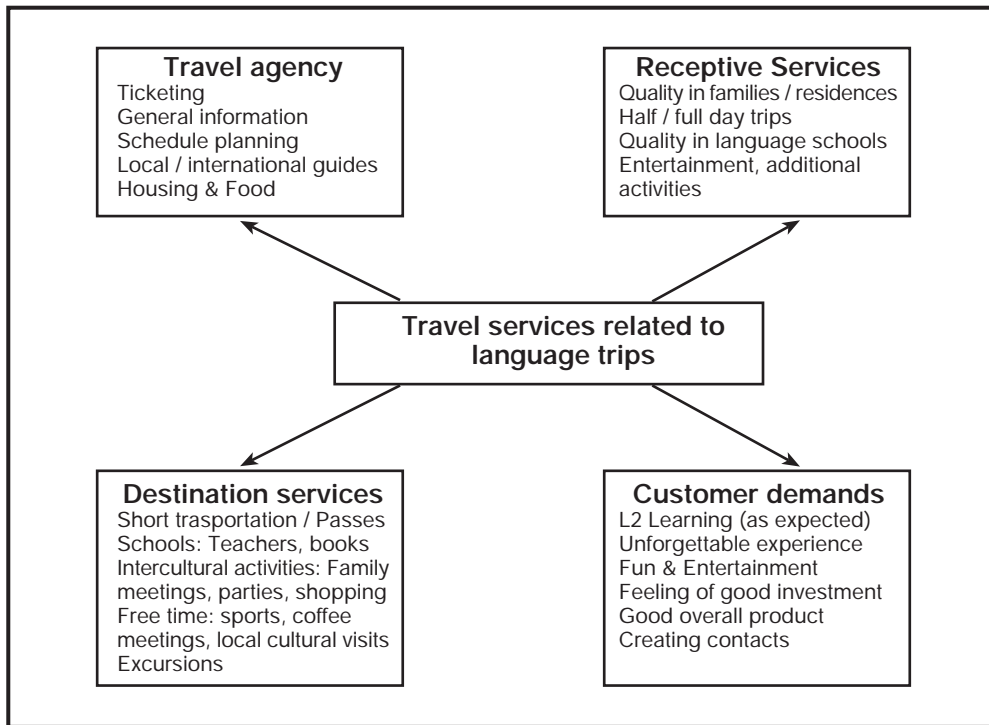


Diagram 1: Travel services in Language trips

The diagram above clarifies only a very small part of the total process carried by the organization of language travel. However, it shows very clearly that while the main reason for the trip, which is the language course, has decreased its importance; many other services are now considered fundamental when only 20 years ago the companies' interest in them was very limited. In spite of all these changes any reader interested in the topic of language travel will still find two main types of language travel organizations: language tourism organizations (i.e. EF) and summer School organizations (although some of them are operative all year round) (i.e. Hilderston College, Kent). At this point it would be desirable to mention what makes the difference between one and the others. Language tourism organizations pose their interest in the enjoyment. In general, classes tend to be an average of 16-18 hours a week (there is usually a break in both types of thirty minutes), have sport and social activities during the week and, most often, a half day excursion (on a weekday) and a full day excursion (Saturday), evening activities run from games for under 18-years-old students to pub meetings or even dance activities for the older students. As opposed, summer Schools usually have an average of 24 class hours a week and their social activities are limited to cultural visits and cinema activities although many also include social events or pub reunions (mainly moved

by the competition with other programs). Summer Schools also organise day trips but are usually full day and give more freedom to the students. Diagram 2 exemplifies these differences. Overall, although both types tend to include students of all ages, Language tourism is usually aimed at younger kids who go in groups while Summer Schools are mostly devoted to adults who go as individuals.

Time or period	Language tourism (usually young kids)	Language Travel in Language schools (usually adults)
8:30 – 13:00 (30 minutes recess)	Classes	Classes
	Lunch	
14:30-16:30	Sports, games, half day trips (all included in the price)	Classes (If students have a different optional activity, they usually need to pay extra)
	Dinner	
19:00 – 21:00	Evening games, disco	Cine Forums, Pub evening

Diagram 2: A typical day in a language program according to the type of trip (according to She Spanish Heritage for language trips to the UK and Ireland).

The key question is how some language trips have become language tourism. The explanation is probably not as easy as expected. The first reason is that the participants in language tourism companies usually go with groups that have been put together through hiring the trip in a language company and who may feel that want to experience more the local culture or want to enjoy as much as they want to learn the language (sometimes even more). On the other hand, participants in the summer School programs tend to value the language learning as their first goal but, in the end, would like to get the same feeling of relevance (the feeling that their investment is worth) and also enjoyment in their trip.

CURRENT ISSUES ASSOCIATED TO LANGUAGE TOURISM

In a recent study, Capellino Ciscar (2004) analysed the typical causes of complaints in many language tourism companies. Furthermore, Capellino discovered that most complaints after return were centred in the families. After analyzing a questionnaire that was distributed to 15 companies all over Spain, she found that most problems could be limited to 3 groups: families, local organizations or schools and organizations in the country of origin. According to her findings these problems could be summarized in the following 11 (although some of them could have many different variations).

LANGUAGE TRAVEL OR LANGUAGE TOURISM: HAVE EDUCATIONAL TRIPS CHANGED SO MUCH?

Category	Problem	Perception	Solved on site, how
Families	Home is not very clean	Students have the feeling that a few houses may not match their origin homes cleanliness	Generally. Visiting the family. Change of families is considered the last resource. Most times a conversation with the student is enough.
	Food	Students' perception of meals varies from one country to another but getting used to new foods can be difficult	Most times. Most times a conversation with the student is enough.
	Too many students of the same nationality in the same home	They speak their L1 in the house	Generally. Either students agree compensations or one or more students will have to be moved out.
	Sense of insecurity with personal belongings	Many students report to miss valuable items but most times is just their perception	Generally. A conversation with the student is usually necessary. If real, student will be moved to a different house.
	Students are distant from their friends (mostly US, Canada, Australia)	Students miss to meet their school / group friends in the evening. A variation of this problem is early curfew with younger students who may have more freedom in their own countries.	Generally. Once the students understand the importance of communication with the host family.

Diagram 3: Common problems in language tourism (own source).

These have been considered the most important issues for a long time. However, experienced tour escorts (or "group leaders" as they are often called) and family organisers are aware that although in just a few cases these complaints are real, most often they are unjustified and they are just a student's response to pre-concepts, prejudices, lack of experience in travel abroad, fears and even first impressions. In one word, culture shock (as seen before). A language travel company reported that one of their most experienced group leaders filed a loss for a large sum of money. After a few weeks, he found he had miscalculated the currency exchange

rates! Some tour leaders (or tour escorts) have suggested that school residences instead of families can be a better option since the traveller is sure that whatever happens in the room is due to one's actions. Capellino reported that this can be true for adults whose independence is highly regarded but she also found that most of the problems related to the families are also perceived in residences and dorms (and then blamed on the cleaning services or those who may have to enter the room).

Category	Problem	Perception	Solved on site, how
Schools	Teaching quality is not very good	Students feel that the procedures, time administration, drilling, dynamics, tasks do not lead to optimal learning. Additionally, some schools are not certified by the British Council.	Not very often. Students understand learning in their own specific ways and are very demanding with their money
	Activities	They are not worth the price	Most times. Most times a conversation with the student is enough. Sometimes reimbursements or compensations are necessary
Schools / Organization	Excursions / field trips are no good or boring		The students' expectations could not match with what is offered. Trying to be positive can help very much
Organization	Overbooking or delays	Lack of organization	Generally. A word with the student
	Lack of information about destination	Little interest	Provide the student with some basic information
	Transfers, buses delayed	Lack of organization	Generally. A word with the student

Diagram 4: Common problems in language tourism(own source) .

These problems are usually due to the students' wrong expectations. Capellino found that urban students are less likely to value activities in the wilderness (like a cycling day, a trip to the countryside, adventure day trips and so) and seem eager to spend most of their field trips or free time going shopping. She actually mentions a case in which in the initial information of a language course in Galway (Ireland) a group of students had been programmed a trip to Dublin (a 8 hour drive). Later, in Ireland, students were informed that if taken the visit would last for up to two hours. The leader reported that it took a full week to convince the group that it was far better to make an excursion to the Isle of Mann than spending a full day on the bus and visiting the city in two hours.

In relation to the quality of the school, Badenes Puig (2005) found a few number of schools that were not certified in the city of Chaltenham. In her study with 37 students from Spain, she expresses her belief that if this omission can be observed in small and medium controllable cities, in the larger ones the problem can be even overwhelming. Although she tackled some of the issues presented in this section, Badenes Puig intended to study in more depth what the students' and family attitudes towards each other's group are. Her idea was that one of the key questions why students may not achieve while attending summer schools in England was the relationship between the students and their host families. It is important to remember that host families were originally chosen (in the 60's) because in the acculturation process the host family is supposed to provide the support that the international student needs due to the distance with his original family and friends in a totally different environment (Bochner, 1986; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Kenny & Rice, 1995) and only partially replaced by the telephone or e-mail (Trice, 2002; Kline & Liu, 2005). Although Badenes Puig's study is inconclusive in this sense, it proved that family problems are usually not very frequent but that problems could be ranked in importance towards the student's final impression of the course. Moreover, she found that although students in junior programs do not spend much time with the host families, given the fact that students are far from their family in Spain, at least in their thought, a good relationship can substitute the feelings of belonging and grouping and thus facilitate learning. On the other hand, if the host family is not accepted, the student will be so stressed that will hardly benefit from the language travel experience. In not few occasions this cultural clash drives the student into a cultural shock unless the student can integrate the foreign cultural and cultural patterns in its life (Pearce, 1995). However, this paper will not discuss this situation that has been addressed many times from different perspectives already.

The school and teaching quality is also another controversial issue that has only vaguely addressed. It is a common criticism that there is a broad difference between the EFL teaching qualifications required to prospective teachers and that run between a few hours (20) to master's in foreign language education (2 years). This situation contrast with the requirements for non native speakers in their own countries. Thus, when the summer peak season comes many schools need extra teachers that are sometimes hired with limited teaching experience and minor teaching skills. As a consequence, some summer programs are poorly taught and the schools do not meet the minimal quality standards (Hinga, 1990). Although many

professionals consider these practices illegal and damaging to the country's educational reputation many students especially in junior programs attend this kind of course. The main problem is that just because the students are not considered valid referees companies tend to ignore whether the main purpose of the trip (language learning) is achieved. In a course in the city of Athlone some years ago one leader with expertise in teacher training and school supervision claimed that the students were neither receiving the correct services by the local coordination nor an acceptable teaching quality. After denouncing the situation to the Spanish company, the Irish organization was informed. The Irish company's reaction was to threaten the leader and although the teaching improved a little, none of the teachers in the program was replaced and the teaching was very criticized in the students' final evaluation of the program. Surprisingly, the Spanish company continued working with the same Irish company for a couple of years until the complaints made it impossible to continue the partnership.

WHAT OTHER ASPECTS ARE DISTINCTIVE IN LANGUAGE TOURISM?

As opposed to the traditional language trip, language tourism companies tend not to use language schools due to the high cost of these educational centres. Indeed, most use regular schools that are hired for smaller groups. These schools are very convenient because of their facilities but very seldom the companies use teachers of the very same institution and in many occasions although the school name is used as a reference, in reality, what the local organization does is hire a couple of rooms and, not always, a few hours of the gym and computer room. It is not necessary to mention that this means that if problems arise the local company finds little help in the school and teachers and students are affected.

Weekly afternoon activities have a special importance because they help the foreign student to adapt to the new environment (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002) and motivate them in their studies (Bergin, 1992). However, local companies try to cut costs and then inexpensive actions are usually preferred. For instance, a language program played videos without subtitles once a week but no language activities were planned around it. However, if the students do not have a lower intermediate proficiency level (B1 in the European Framework) and are not very familiar with the film the input is much higher above their competence both in quality and quantity and as a consequence this activity does not lead to learning and becomes a complete waste of time and generally leads to boredom. Likewise, many leaders have noticed that those teachers and guides that are supposed to accompany junior groups tend to avoid their responsibilities. As one tour leader says "...we had a wonderful history teacher but as soon as we arrived to York she just disappeared. When we went back to the bus we found she had been visiting a friend instead of coming with us".

DOES LANGUAGE TOURISM LEAD TO LANGUAGE LEARNING?

Despite the many disadvantages expressed above, it is important to evaluate the effect of language tourism in the students' learning. The following chart (diagram 5) presents the positive and negative aspects of language tourism.

LANGUAGE TRAVEL OR LANGUAGE TOURISM: HAVE EDUCATIONAL TRIPS CHANGED SO MUCH?

Aspects of language learning	Positive aspects	Negative aspects
Input and exposure to English	Students can hear native accents of a variety of backgrounds and origin. They can also read and operate in a variety of registers.	If students travel in groups most conversation is in L1. When the class is mostly formed by students from the same group interaction with other non native speakers with the same proficiency level is almost inexistent.
Classroom dynamics	Teachers make a change in what students usually do in their own country (after all, the purpose of Summer courses is more oriented towards non academic goals). There is an intercultural exchange of classroom behaviours. Tasks, drills and activities are also different to what students are used to. Usually they are more realistic and amusing.	If students were looking for a real international interaction they may feel frustrated. Pupils may feel disappointed if they do not understand the teaching style or the rationale that differentiates the teaching between their country of origin and the country they visit.
Use of English	It is contextualized. Projects in the street / family can help to make English real. Communicative language is emphasized.	When students have a limited experience of English in context (for instance, they spend most of the time with their L1 group) their learning may decrease due to a lack of interest, input or opportunities to interact.
Social skills and motivation	The experience can trigger the interest in future trips or interest in meeting new people. When students can communicate, even in daily situations, with the local people it fosters the student's interest in getting immersed in the new culture.	Spending too much time with the L1 group limits interaction with local people. Also staying with the group make weaker L2 speakers rely upon the most advantaged and limits their interaction and opportunities for communication with local people.
Accuracy	When language use teachers are familiar with the L2 speakers' language problems, their grammar and language use formal teaching can be very beneficial.	Not all the teachers in the English speaking country know about L2 learning or even language skills.
Vocabulary	Increases both consciously and subconsciously.	
Productive and receptive skills	It is always positive but even better in L1 mixed groups. When most students have the same origin teachers need to limit the students' L1 use to the minimum and stress activities that can promote the students' interaction.	

Diagram 5: Effects of language tourism in EFL learning (own source).

Overall, language tourism can mean a great deal of exposure to the foreign language and, above all, exposure to real people's speech. Thus, travel organizations should care about providing genuine interactions for their student travellers. Language organizations should also be especially careful with the teachers they use since in language tourism language acquisition is second in importance after acculturation and opportunities for conversation. In this sense, it is necessary to point that countries like England or Ireland have such a great demand of teachers that usually some of the teachers may no have the necessary qualification or teaching skills, and, consequently, reducing the educational value of the stay considerably. Obviously, this experience should be attractive for most students a push the foreign students to use the language in daily and social interactions that cannot be achieved in their own country. Other linguistic considerations are mentioned in diagram 5.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, language tourism is mostly beneficial for all the students but it is important to be aware of who it should be recommended to. First, it can be a valuable experience for younger kids who do not need to rush in their L2 learning and can use more time in entertaining activities. Shy students may also benefit from the fact of not having to travel on their own. If the trip is a reward, the idea of getting relaxed and have fun in a L2 environment is very gratifying. Second, it is important to decide how to choose the right company. In this sense, students and parents should get together and consider aspects like the price, company's reputation, information about the destination (some people still believe that London is the best place for immersion programs!), the contract (some parents get false impressions about what their children will get in the trip) and make sure that the student understands that the trip should be worth.

Language tourism is different from language trips in very many different ways, and it can be a unique experience for many students opening new worlds to them. Students (or parents) should be very aware of their own goals and put them forward. Although English learning may not be as important in language tourism many students improve their language proficiency level if the program is well chosen and their interpersonal skills developed throughout the trip. Dawson (1990) has assured that it also helps to make students more mature and independent, and, on top of these advantages, it can also be great fun.

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