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Become an International Ambassador with People to People

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Become an International Ambassador with People to People

Abstract

An international Extension experience can be maximized by being part of a professional delegation with the People to People Ambassador Program. Founded by President Eisenhower, People to People promotes his belief that ordinary citizens of different nations, if able to communicate directly, would solve their differences and find a way to live in peace. This program is an opportunity for Extension educators to gain an understanding of global issues that require local action and local issues that have global impact. It is a rewarding experience being part of a professional delegation sharing knowledge and culture, one person at a time.

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Why International Travel

Have you ever considered an international Extension experience yet quickly gave up on the idea because of travel barriers? One way to maximize the experience and feel at ease is to be part of a professional delegation with the People to People Ambassador Program.

As a county-based Extension educator, I was looking for an opportunity to gain an understanding of global issues that require local action and local issues that have global impact (Ludwig, 2002). I wanted more than a travel agency could provide by visiting tourist attractions. I needed to experience the culture of ordinary working people. I also wanted to relate to fellow professionals as we tackled similar issues. A 2-week leave was the limit of my absence from county responsibilities. Sound impossible? I accomplished this and much more with the People to People Ambassador Program.

Background of the People to People Ambassador Program

"I have long believed, as have many before me, that peaceful relations between nations require understanding and mutual respect between individuals."

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Founder, People to People International

President Eisenhower believed that ordinary citizens of different nations, if able to communicate directly, would solve their differences and find a way to live in peace. This simple thought--that people can make the difference where government cannot--is People to People's foundation. Since 1956, the People to People organization has continued President Eisenhower's vision. This same model is followed as Extension educators relate one-on-one with their local clientele. Taking this caring attitude to a foreign country is a natural transition for Extension educators as they can become ambassadors of American good will.

Delegations of Professionals

Ambassador Programs coordinate delegations of similar professional expertise. An Extension educator in any program area or specialization can relate to professional focus areas offered such as:

- Agriculture
- Education
- Social Sciences
- Business
- Health and Medicine
- Law
- Arts and Humanities
- Science and Technology

Most delegations consist of 12 to 30 members who may be from public or private institutions, industry, or self-employed. Participants can develop strong friendships among themselves and their hosts while sharing their knowledge and professional experiences.

Off the Beaten Path

An advantage of being an Ambassador with People to People is the ability to experience places and people other tourists would not be able to experience. Hosts will not treat you as just another tour group passing through. People to People is respected around the world as an organization offering professional exchange of ideas and culture. Access to top government and scientific leaders is not unusual for a delegation. Also, places off-limits to foreigners may be visited and studied when traveling under the banner of People to People. Especially important is the ability to interact one-on-one with people who are eager to share their knowledge and culture.

Making Friends with 1.3 Billion Chinese

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit China as a participant of an American Society of Agronomy delegation organized with People to People. I shared the successes of conservation tillage technology research in my home county by giving a presentation at the Northwest Sci-Tech University of Agriculture and Forestry near Xi'an in central China. I concluded that even though our countries are very different, our concern for the conservation of our land is similar.

An important component of the People to People program is allowing participants an understanding of the culture and history of the areas visited. To better understand the agriculture foundation of China, People to People allowed our group to get the feel of the country and its people by utilizing a cultural exchange. We were able to visit Tiananmen Square, The Great Wall, Forbidden City, Terra-Cotta Warriors museum, Stone Forest, and other sites for a historical perspective. We based our visits in three areas of China: Beijing, Xi'an, and Kunming, covering a distance of 1,200 miles from north to south.

When traveling around the country, we were able to meet with our professional counterparts at agricultural universities as well as with individual farmers. They were able to share their agricultural knowledge with us by allowing us to visit their research sites. Also, we were allowed on farms and observed first hand the Chinese farmer's way of life.

One of the first obvious observations of our group when we traveled out of the large cities to the countryside was the variety of crops grown there. Currently 21% of the world's corn is grown in China. Farm sizes remain small as many tasks are still completed manually. Farming in China is hard labor, but the farmers that I visited took pride in what they did and their contribution to feeding the people of their country. While farmers in China cannot own land, most conveyed the impression that their quality of life or standard of living has increased significantly over the past decade.

A New Perspective

My international travel experience has changed my priorities for Extension programming that I deliver. I try to help people understand the effect of global issues on local concerns. Whenever possible, I look for opportunities to share the common problems American and Chinese farmers have trying to feed a growing population while protecting their natural resources. I feel that I have now switched roles and become an ambassador representing the Chinese people to my home community, trying to correct the misconceptions of China that people have.

Are you looking for a new perspective on the world? Do you have a desire to connect with others on a personal and professional level? The People to People program can provide an opportunity for Extension educators to make a difference in the world, one person at a time.

For more information on People to People, visit: <http://www.ambassadorprograms.org/>

References

Ludwig, B. G. (2002). Global in our backyard. *Journal of Extension* [On-line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2002april/comm1.html>

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