

This collection of tripper recommendations came in to me in just a day or two. Unsolicited and unbiased and not from your parents.

Dear 9th Grade Tripper,

I'm make this short. I can really say in five words why you should attend this trip...

Evan
Quentin
Ian
Lindsay
Nikki

In 2000 I attended the 9th grade trip. Starting out I was VERY uncertain as to the importance of spending 10 days locked on a bus with 50 other kids my age. I defiantly wanted to quit more than once. But ten years later, I can say, without hesitation, that those ten days contain some of the most power memories I think I will ever have. And more importantly than that - ten years later, people I met on that trip are some of my best and strongest friends.

I know it seems weird now, but take a chance. Take a chance on yourself and really allow your self to enjoy it. I know, you will be thankful for that experience for the rest of your life. I will be.

With hope that you go,

Meg 2000 9th Grade Trip

I went on the 9th grade trip in 1992, with Geoff and Rebecca Hunt pounding down the highway in the old "Big Blue Bus", with a huge group of us not knowing that we were forming a bond that would last us a lifetime, and learning about a culture that would open our eyes to new worlds right here in the United States. I had few friends in 9th grade, but going on road trips through the desert has a way of creating friendships that last. I am still friends with many of the people I met on that trip, nearly 20 years ago now (my god has it been that long?). They are among the greatest people I've ever known, and when we get together, we often still talk about our misadventures on the reservation as teenagers. And learning about the focused calm and spiritual way of life of the Hopi and Navajo have opened my eyes to other cultures and religions that very few people really understand. Years later, while in medical school, I worked for a month in the emergency room in Chinle, in the heart of the Navajo nation, and I was amazed at how much I still yearned for it, and how much I remembered from that trip. I treated patients there with horrible health problems, and I used the knowledge I had gained on that trip to help me understand when certain illnesses were beyond my reach as a doctor, and when I needed to refer my patients to the local medicine man, who worked with us in a hogan right at the hospital. At 33 years old, I am now an emergency room doctor, a veteran of 3 wars, I've been to over 20 countries around the world and I've known and worked with vast ranges of people from famous US politicians, wizened generals, Arabian princes and obscure holy leaders. And of all the

things I've been through, I still look back on the 9th grade trip as one of the best things I've ever done in my life. I highly recommend it to anyone, it has the power to change your life, if you allow it to.

Jarrad, 9th grade trip alumni

Top 10 Reasons to go on the Trip, Despite The Fact That Your Parents Are Forcing You

10. You'll see stuff they've never seen and get to talk about stuff they probably know nothing about
9. It's guaranteed to change your perspective on how the world works. Guaranteed.
8. You'll make interesting friends (very interesting)
7. You'll do something most of your school friends won't get to do
6. You'll stand in 4 states at the same time (if it's the same route I took)
5. There are actual, quiet moments that you will actually enjoy
4. Chances are good your bus won't break down (like ours did)
3. You might get the chance to sleep in a hogan (like I did)
2. You will join a very small and elite group of people who have actually stuck it out and done this thing
1. C'mon, you know you wanna go

The Trip started as the bane of my existence and turned into my haven and saving grace. I still talk about the trip, draw on my experiences and use it as a spiritual touchstone and I'm 40 years old! (I know! So old!)

One more thing: I'm going to "force" my daughter to go when she's old enough.

In ninth grade I was told I was going to go on the Ninth Grade trip with church. I considered whether it was worth leaving for an entire week, especially during the middle of the school year. They say for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. I realize that I am in a sense, a result of my past, and the things that I learned that week while I was "down the road" were not something that can be expressed with much other than "love" and "growth". I learned more about myself and my closest friends than I ever could have imagined, or done otherwise. I am glad I decided to go down the road, because now I am going to college at one of the only College in the United States which offers a tuition waver to Native Americans. No, this was not just by chance, this was my decision based on my values, and my past. I met my best friend (6 years ago) on the Ninth grade trip, and learned my passion for learning about other cultures. If you don't go, just realize that you might have missed out on an experience of a lifetime, which turned me into a better human being. The fact that 6 years later I still value this trip as one of the funnest and most powerful experiences of my life speaks to the value of the experience, and to the people who make it happen every year.

David

If you're thinking of going on the 9th Grade Trip, there's pretty much one bit of advice that I have to help you with your decision: DO IT. Yes, the classes can be tedious, and yes, you may not know the other trippers too well yet, and yes, the adults may seem scary at first... But what's really true is (as Mitch would say), the actual trip is an entirely different dynamic, and it's really worth doing. Being the third tripper of my family, I know that both my siblings and I have made life-long friends in just the 10 days that I had on the 9th Grade Trip. When thinking about who I know really supports me and really loves me for who I am, the people that I went on the trip with are the ones that come to mind. And as my friendships are some of the most important things to me, I am eternally thankful that I decided to go on the 9th Grade Trip.

Tessa

My parents made me go on the 9th grade trip. My mom saw a few girls talking about it, and it seemed to have made such a great impact on them that she was determined to have me go, too. I wasn't quite as convinced, but I decided to humor her. Later, I found out that the trip that year coincided with a play I really wanted to do, and with a crucial week of studying for finals. Seeing this, I freaked out and wanted to quit, but my mom made me stick it out. I'm so glad I did. Turns out, everyone I hadn't really liked was incredibly cool, and I'm now friends with everyone that was on my trip! We're such a close-knit group, because we really bonded over the trip. As for the conflicts, there were so many smart people on the trip that studying with them during some of the ample bus time was more than enough, and I passed all of my exams easily. Even the play I didn't really miss much, because I was having so much fun. The only thing I regret about the ninth grade trip is how much I miss about so many of my trip friends who live far away- now some of my closest friends are scattered all over Colorado! Even though I miss those people, I'm so happy I went on the 9th. It really was the best trip I ever could have taken.

Ruby

Hope - 2012 9th Grade Trip

When I got back from the trip, I didn't feel that different. It wasn't a huge change at first. I had a great time, and met amazing people, but for the most part I was still the same me that had got on the bus 10 days earlier. Now that I'm back in school and meeting, and talking to more people, I'm realizing how much this trip HAS changed me. It was the small things I learned on the trip that have grown and grown into something incredible. I can safely say that I am a completely different person. Not that I'm not bubbly or silly like before, but I'm more confident. I don't allow other people to affect the way I feel about myself. I'm more sure in who I am and it shows in the decisions or choices I make. I feel more grounded, and sure that whatever path I take is the right one. I have you and all of Unitarianism to thank for that:) Thank you for being you! Thank you, thank you, thank you:) I love you all!

The Ninth Grade Trip

By Miranda

"What is God to you, Miranda?" a lofty question to ask a 14 year old. An even greater one to ask a 14 year old girl clad in second skin black jeans and a ripped t-shirt, with Technicolor hair resembling Medusa's serpentine curls and who is a member of a nondenominational faith. Before April 2008 I would have responded with a noise not unlike a failing machine and the classic eye roll. My lips could have framed the words "God is dead." But something happened to me that spring. I fell in love with the world. I found trust, meaning, joy, the light, God, connection to the earth and her children, energy, enlightenment, heaven on earth. Whatever, in my mind, it is christened as the Ninth Grade Trip.

We, ninth graders from all the Unitarian Universalist churches in the Mountain Desert District in Colorado, had been learning about the Hopi and Navajo cultures all year. We had attended retreats for eight months to watch fuzzy films from the 70's and sluggish documentaries about corn. Responsible adults, those who would chaperone us on the trip, taught us. Mitch Pingel was the guru of all knowledge Ninth Grade Trip. He was the leader, and he earned his respect well. Mitch was mastered in the arts of embroidery, hand gestures, and strange phrases. Bees started singing, the buds started to color, and we 43 ninth graders knew a substantial amount about the Hopi and Navajo tribes. We would need this knowledge, for the trip was to take us into a world draped in geometric rugs, sprinkled with beads and buzzing with ancient tradition.

We drove to the dry lands in a monster mobile. The bus was nice inside though. Plush gray seats stood in pairs on either side of a skinny isle. A permanent toothless grin of tinted glass ran along the sides of the coach. I plopped down next to my soon to be best friend. Her long face would become a constant. I have seen her eyes become glassy orbs staring into space, but I have also seen her freckly complexion glow with joy. Across from us sat Nate and Kate, two slender people with dazzling smiles. Devon and Caity, the blonde ones, Audry and Logan, the couple, Erik and Matthew the naïve, Frances and Hannah, all sat near. The air became thick with our breath as the bus lumbered down the dry Colorado highway.

The eight hour drive to Durango, Colorado lasted an eon. The Durango UU church graciously opened its arms to us for the night. Wonderful bonds had already started to form between my fellow trippers and me. The next day we awoke with the sun and set our sights on the Hopi reservation. After about two hours we arrived on Hopi lands. A man named Bertrum gave us a tour of his village, Oraibi, atop Third Mesa. The exhale of the Great Spirit seemed to drive the wind on the reservation. Hostile gusts flung grit into my face. When I blinked I could almost hear the crunch. Fittingly so, Oraibi appeared battered. Bertrum explained that the rez was in 3rd world conditions. Houses were constructed simply of wood and mud. Mangy dogs fought in corners while barefoot kids scuttled inside to escape the soaring sand. It was beautiful. Oraibi pounded with the sound of its beating hearts. Tradition, community and love emanated from the tattered village. This hit me in the face with more force than any wind could muster. Love. Conditions were so weak, but love prevailed. Power of people filled me. My eyes began to overflow. This is when the life changing started to happen.

Over the next eight days my perspective was altered. Our group had the amazing chance to see a Kachina dance. It appeared to whirl with color and movement, like an optical illusion. Rain, Matthew and I also we're exposed to Hopi kindness. Cal, a Hopi man, invited us to have dinner at his house during the Kachina dance. He kept saying "It's so great to have you here." He filled us with happiness and corn soup. Many of us trippers made ribbon bracelets and gave them out to little kids. Fascination and surprise spread across the children's lips. At Hopi High school we connected with students our own age too. Later that week we traveled over to the Navajo Reservation. Once on

Navajo we visited several elementary schools and went to classes with the children. Eye opening though the cultural experience was, it wasn't what impacted me most.

My defining moment was watching the sunset into Canyon de Chelly. On sacred Navajo land, I stood looking over the ravine cut into the earth. Our glowing neon orb sank into the crevice behind spider rock, casting haunting shadows across the riddled red-orange land. Everything was gone. All the problems in the world were resolved. My internal turmoil turned to dust. Negativity flew away. Infidelity was nothing. Unadulterated love was the only thing that remained. It pulsed through me. I could feel it in the bodies of my friends as we embraced. Our eyes began to overflow and our chests to shake with tremors of humanity. Ancient wind swept across my soul, tickling my face and whispering secrets to my skin as I raised my clear head. I felt the history that had passed through this canyon. Records of hatred and death were burned into the layers of rock, but love, so powerful, prevailed. My faith in humanity was restored. I discovered gratitude for the world and all its children, including myself. Pure golden light radiated from every tear cried, every hand held, every torso hugged, every word spoken, every sunset, and every person.

Yes, other events took place that shaped my new view of the world. I connected with friends in incredibly strong ways. I watched stars in the desert sky, hugged someone so tight it hurt, fabricated fantasies of magical wanderings, played the game Silent Football, pretended to be infected with mange, wrote raps and fell asleep grasping the hands of ten other people. The Ninth Grade trip did exhume what I had been missing for 14 years of my life. God is right in front of me. God is the earth. God is humor. God is people. God is experience. God is connection. God is love.