



For Flute Focus 2007

The Arctic Wind Flute Choir Concert Tours
Flute Choirs Around the World

Fun? Yes! Exhausting? Absolutely! Touring with a high school flute choir is not for the faint of heart. It is a huge amount of work and there is tremendous responsibility associated with taking youth on overseas tours, however the gratification of showing young flute players other countries in the world makes it all worthwhile. Coming from Alaska, the rest of the world seems very far away, so it is especially gratifying to provide the opportunity for my students to begin to develop a world perspective.

Touring with teenagers requires a tremendous amount of work, attention to detail, infinite patience and the ability to stay in good humor inspite of stress and exhaustion. The first step in setting up a tour is to choose a destination. I select destinations based on several criteria. First, it must be a place to which I am excited about traveling. Considering the amount of work it takes to set up a tour, the element of excitement is very important. Excitement is contagious and is part of the fun of any travel adventure.

2002 was the first Arctic Wind Flute Choir Concert and Adventure Tour. I had toured with other youth organizations, but this was the first tour I designed, implemented and led. (itinerary attached) I chose central California, because I had lived there, knew lots of flute players and had a pretty good idea about how I could make it work. In addition to the concerts and sight-seeing, I also scheduled some exciting adventures for the students. The most thrilling was rappelling (abseiling) into a cave in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and spending an hour spelunking. Not all the students chose to do such an extreme activity, but the ones that did had a thrilling time. Musically, the greatest thrill was our performance at the Palace of the Legion of Honor Art Museum in San Francisco where we performed in formal concert dress in front of the massive Rodin sculpture in the grand entrance hall.

The second important criteria in setting up a Flute Choir tour is securing a sponsoring organization, school, flute club or flute choir to help set up activities, concerts and/or workshops. This is also important for arranging homestays for the students. The ideal tour is a cultural exchange and the best way for students to learn about other countries and cultures is to actually stay in the homes of flute players their own ages. I have found that the best scenario is to split time between billeting with host families and lodging in youth hostels. About the time my students start to get homesick, I arrange for them to be grouped in youth hostel rooms which turns the tour into a giant slumber party and makes the students feel secure and less homesick.

Our second tour in 2004 was to Paris and London. I was able to arrange homestays and a performance through my friend, Margaret Cook, at L'Ecole Koenig. My dear, sweet students from the far north lands of Alaska were terrified at the thought of arriving in Paris and being shuttled off to stay with their Parisian hosts. However, I made sure that my students who knew no French were with families that spoke at least some English and my students who spoke

French were housed with the families that did not speak English. The next morning every one of my students came to me and said, "I love my French mom and dad!" One girl told me about a very long conversation with her new French little brother and then confessed that she hadn't actually understood a single word!

Touring to a country with a native language different from your own presents additional challenges, but is very possible to manage. I just make sure that there is at least one adult in the group completely fluent in the language of the country. Then, all the students are required to learn polite phrases. They especially must learn a phrase such as "Hello. I am so terribly sorry, I do not speak _____. Do you speak English?" Every time such courtesy is rewarded with a smile or a laugh.

A successful concert tour is truly only possible if you have cultivated excellent students. Members of the Arctic Wind Flute Choir often progress through two training flute choirs before they pass the audition into the Arctic Wind Flute Choir top ensemble and touring choir. Then we spend an entire season cultivating performance skill and repertoire before launching on our tours. I like to have twelve students in the ensemble; however I have toured with up to twenty. Twelve is a nice number. It gives us a nice, full flute choir sound; good pitch control, tone and balance are all manageable and it keeps the group feeling more like a family than a mob.

I am often asked if I use professional tour organizing companies and the answer is that I do not. Every time I have considered it, I have had problems. The touring companies often do not want to work with small groups like my flute choir and when they do present a bid, it is always way more expensive than what I can arrange. So, even though it means extensive work for me, it also means I can carefully control the budget, making it feasible for the students to afford the tour.

Important advice: Choose your chaperones carefully! They can make or break a tour. I highly recommend not taking parents on the tour as chaperones. They rarely are able to treat their own child equal to the others. Sometimes it is better, more often worse. I like to choose one mother, one father and one older mentor student usually a university student or a recent graduate. That means we have a tour mom, a tour dad and when I am asked what I am, the answer is, "I'm the one with the big stick."

Once you have chosen a destination, created initial contacts with sponsoring organizations, have an appropriate number of students excited about the prospect and have in mind possible chaperones, then it is time to present a proposal to the students and their parents and to get a commitment from the families for the tour. Design a proposal that includes a tentative budget and a sample itinerary. I also recommend setting the budget slightly high and then decreasing it as you determine actual costs. It is easier to lower the cost of a tour than to raise it. The budget for the Arctic Wind Flute Choir tours includes the cost of airfare, ground transportation, all lodging, all meals and all group activities. The only expenses the students incur are for their own souvenirs and snacks. When we are having group meals, I simply ask that students stay within a preset limit for their ordering. I recommend dividing up the tour payment into monthly amounts that the students can raise funds to meet.

Raising funds:

Most of the students in the Arctic Wind Flute Choir must raise 100% of the funds for the tour. Some students prefer to get a job as their basic strategy; others participate fully in all our fundraising schemes. One of our favorite ways to raise money is through our performances. We

often provide background music for corporate parties especially during the holiday season. Sometimes we volunteer our performances, then “pass the hat.” Other times we charge admission for our concerts. We recycle inkjet and toner cartridges, laptops and pda’s for cash, gift wrap during the holidays, have garage sales, car washes and sweep parking lots (and after a long winter there are many parking lots to sweep in Alaska.) However, our best ways to raise tour funds is through the sale of our own concert cd’s, “The Sky’s No Limit” and through selling advertising in our formal concert programs. The key to raising money for touring is to start well in advance. Now that we have established a tour schedule that has us traveling every other year, the students can actually take two seasons to raise the funds they need for our grand adventures.

Getting ready to Go - Lists and More Lists!

The first priority is to make sure all students have valid passports and visas (if necessary) very early. Double check with the Embassy of the country to which you are traveling to make sure there are not any restrictions that can catch you by surprise. For example, some countries require that the passports are not within three months of expiration. Also, be very aware if you have foreign students in your ensemble. Their passport, visa and green card requirements may be different for them and you have to be very certain that they can not only entry the foreign country, but also be readmitted to your own country when you return home.

I am the queen of forms. These forms include a parent permission form for the tour; medical release, insurance information and disclosure of all medications and conditions; a limited power of attorney for the authority to authorize emergency medical; and a list of tour rules with a zero tolerance policy that every student and their parents must sign. This includes the policy that any student who misbehaves will be sent home immediately at their parents’ expense and I spell out just how expensive that will be! Consequently I have never had to send any student home early.

I also provide every student with “The Ultimate Pack List.” This is a completely comprehensive list of what to pack and what not to pack. Every person on the tour must be able to carry their own luggage.

Our 2006 tour was by far the best to date. We had a phenomenal mix of performances and adventures as we toured to both the north and south islands of New Zealand. Towards the end of the tour we visited the rural area of Waitomo on the north island to take advantage of the adventure opportunities there. When we checked into the youth hostel, the manager strongly recommended I take the students on the Ruakuri Bush Walk, but to do it at night. So, that evening after our pizza dinner I asked my very tired students who wanted to have a night adventure in the New Zealand bush. All of the students wanted to go. Then I said, “O.K. This is a test of the Ultimate Pack List. How many of you actually packed the required flashlight.” Amazingly almost every student had a flashlight. So we convinced our Magic Traveler bus driver, Rob, to haul us out to the trail head and we headed down the trail in the pitch black of the New Zealand night. After a brief walk, the group accorded to a halt and there we saw the trail lined with the magical blue lights of glow worms. It was as if there were little fairy lights casting a glow at our feet. Farther on after crossing a rope bridge we marveled to see a silver fern arching over the trail, catching the light of our torches and glowing as if dipped in silver. It was a magical experience right up until Katie and Katy while messing around managed to drop their flashlight in a ravine.

The working itinerary I provide to the students and their families includes weblinks and detailed information. This turns into the final itinerary as we get ready to leave on tour. Then after we

return home, I send each student a copy of the ultimate itinerary as a souvenir of what we actually did on the tour.

The final details before traveling include organizing cell phones and calling cards. Often this means obtaining special access numbers from the phone companies. Calling credit card and debit card companies and alerting them to “unusual activity,” changing money, so everyone has at least some money in the currency of the country when we arrive. All documents must be copied in triplicate. The tour director holds one set of copies of all important documents, plus collects and holds passports and plane tickets if they are paper tickets. Students are well briefed on keeping their belongings, documents, money and especially their flutes safe. Each student is responsible for their own flute (and piccolo) and their tour music stand. The large flutes are packed together in a hard case with foam padding since they must be checked luggage. We make matching, laminated luggage tags in a bright color to help identify our bags. That way when we arrive and are collecting luggage, some students can grab the bags as they come off the belt, while others stand guard.

On the Tour

It is essential that the tour director take the time to verify all arrangements. As you get ready to move to a new location, call and verify. The last thing in the world you want is to arrive at in a new city and find out that the youth hostel has the wrong dates. Update your budget daily as you have the actual costs of the tour. I find that I usually run slightly under budget, so there are some funds for additional activities along the way.

Keep a careful eye on your students. Do not blink even for a moment! The Arctic Wind Flute Choir has a policy of everyone helping each other. This is tremendously beneficial. I often have students coming to me and giving me a “heads up” about possible problems developing. This way it can all be solved before there is an actual crisis. I especially watch the students at meal times. It is so crucial that they all eat well, plus it is a nice moment for me to stop and chat with each student individually. I always want to verify that they have called home so their parents won't be worried.

After a hideously long plane ride from Anchorage, Alaska to Christchurch, New Zealand, the Arctic Wind Flute Choir spent the day soaking in the thermal pools at Hanmer Springs. The next morning Ashley came to me and said, “I called my dad last night. I told him I was in hot water.” He replied, “What did you do?!”

Ashley laughed. She said he was horrified that she had done something terribly wrong, but then she said, “I told him you were in hot water too!”

He replied, “What did Barbara do?!!”

Then she explained that we were all quite literally in hot water and that it had been wonderful.

With careful planning and preparation these tours become life changing events for the students involved. We have performed in Southwark Cathedral (where William Shakespeare went to church), bungy jumped at Lake Taupo, New Zealand, and viewed Paris from the top of the Eiffel Tower. We have performed at schools, in churches and at the youth hostels where we have stayed for large and small audiences. We have presented workshops and masterclasses, met students and teachers and have developed lasting friendships with flute players around the world.

One of our most memorable performances was at a Maori hangi in Rotorua. As part of the formal, Maori ceremony the guests are required to give a gift of music. Normally the tourists are organized into singing "You are my Sunshine" because apparently everyone in the world knows the words to that song. Instead, the Arctic Wind Flute Choir played "The Water is Wide" and dedicated it to the Maori legend of Tutanikai who played the flute and Hinemoa, his beloved, who swam at night across the large Lake Rotorua guided by the sound of the flute, to be with her own true love. After hearing this story one of my students commented, "I'm so glad I'm a flute player."