

How to Make the Most of Digital Field Trips

Field trips give students a sense of adventure, in a new setting, and provide an opportunity for immersive learning. Now, virtual field trips can take students anywhere in the world without them ever leaving the classroom. These digitally driven “trips” are budget friendly and often equally as engaging as a real world experience.

Engage in a Virtual Field Trip

Unlike having to listen to a lecture (remember the dreaded slide-show?), virtual field trips give K-12 students an opportunity to explore a moment in time, a culture, or an art period as if they were really there. These trips may feature:

- A real-time chat with students or professionals in another place.
- Digital tours of places, including museums and national/world heritage sites.
- Interactive activities allowing students the opportunity to “use” a different currency or engage in activities on a farm.
- Virtual reality experiences with Google Cardboard or a similar device.
- A real-life component that brings the classroom to life (e.g., offering a culturally relevant snack or inviting students to dress the part).
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Whether your school is high tech or low tech, you can create an outstanding experience to improve retention rates without going on an expensive and time consuming real world field trip. One elementary school in Delaware that participated in a test version of the Google Expedition Pioneers program, for example, [created a classroom field trip](#) to Egypt, as well as Australia’s coral reefs. The students used their virtual reality goggles to follow their “tour guide” teacher through the experience.

Virtual field trips also provide students with an opportunity to peek into places they would normally never get to see. For instance, one teacher [organized a Ford’s Theatre virtual field trip](#) featuring areas of the theater that aren’t typically open to the public.

Create Your Own Virtual Field Trips

Until true virtual reality experiences become more widely available, teachers may still create amazing opportunities that invite participation and increase student participation. Here are some tips for leveraging technology in your own classroom field trips:

- Identify your teaching goals. What do you need to focus on in your lesson plans? Instead of concentrating on straightforward lectures, try to think of an interdisciplinary field trip that will provide the basic information and a fun experience.
- Use as many technological devices as you can. Technological tie-ins improve the overall experience. Instead of seeing a google snippet of paintings in the Louvre, look for high definition images that give students an opportunity to see the textures and paint strokes as if they were really there. Consider using chat, virtual reality, social media, surveys, and interactive programs to enrich the experience.
- Let someone else do the hard work for you. Many people create ready-to-go virtual field trips that may line up perfectly with your lesson plans. Look for online resources to [enrich your existing plans](#) or discover a brand new field trip opportunity. For example, [PolarHusky.com](#) allows students to learn about the environment and indigenous cultures through the exploration of dog-sledding in the Arctic.
- Tie in an assignment. Improve participation rates during a virtual field trip with an assignment that requires your students to absorb information and think about what they learn in a wider context. Encourage everyone to ask questions and share their insights with the group.

Virtual field trips give educators and students the opportunity to step outside their comfort zones and turn any the classroom into a brand new exciting environment. If you've never done anything virtual in the classroom before, take small steps. Test drive the field trip on your own, and mix and match field trip ideas to create your own unique experience.