

UPPER SCHOOL INTRATERM

February 15-19, 2027

Purpose & Mission

Intraterm is an intensive, week-long experiential learning program led by VMS teachers, during which students in grades 9 through 12 step away from their daily academic schedules to engage in a focused course of study designed to expand their intellectual curiosity. By pausing regular classes, students gain the freedom to immerse themselves in subject matter outside the standard curriculum and explore topics beyond their typical interests.

CORE PROGRAM ELEMENTS

- **Ethical Leadership:** Students engage with ethical dilemmas, practice responsible decision-making, and learn from our partners around the world as they model the complexity of problem-solving in local and global contexts.
- **Real-World Engagement:** Every course integrates authentic, hands-on experiences, whether collaborating with experts, investigating natural environments, or developing solutions to real-world challenges.
- **Cultural Competency:** Through immersion and dialogue with diverse communities, students develop empathy, open-mindedness, and a broader perspective on differing traditions and viewpoints.

THE CYCLE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The VMS **"PARCA"** model is an experiential education framework that guides all Intraterm courses. Students begin by **P**reparing intellectually and logistically before diving into immersive on-course experiences in which they **A**ctively engage with new environments and challenges. Through structured evening circles and post-course discussions, students **R**eflect on their experiences, **C**onnect their personal insights to broader global and local themes, and ultimately **A**pply their learning. We also incorporate service learning into our Intraterm courses prior to travel. We honor Martin Luther King Jr. Day by inviting students to "take the day on" through service-learning projects, which allow students to reflect on Dr. King's legacy of service, compassion, and justice. This gives students the opportunity to connect their course content to our local community before they engage with our broader global community.



IMPACT & GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

Intraterm aligns directly with Vail Mountain School's mission and is an essential component of our experiential education model. Participation is mandatory for all Upper School students for all four years as part of their graduation requirements. VMS alumni frequently highlight Intraterm courses and travel experiences as key drivers of their personal growth and overall high school education.

Course Selection & Schedule

STUDENT SIGN UPS

At Town Meeting (mid-October), we reveal the course catalog to students. Following this presentation, families and students are emailed the course catalog and the google form to submit their preferences. We ask students to rank their top five course choices using the google form linked here. Please note: only student email addresses "@vms.edu" will be able to fill out this form. On this form, students are asked to verify that they have reviewed and approved their choices with their family. Please take the time to review the course offerings in the catalog as a family, considering February break plans, sports and work schedules, and other obligations. We encourage students to try a variety of Intraterm courses over their 4 years, as these experiences will benefit them in different ways. **The due date for submitting preferences is 3:15 pm on Monday, November 2nd, 2026.**

CREATING COURSE GROUPS

We want students to sign up for a course because of what it offers, not because their friends are interested. Students are asked to rank their top 5 course choices. When creating course groups, a variety of factors come into play: we consider whether the student has participated in this type of experience before, the student's year, and the group's dynamics. It is hard to accommodate course changes after the groups are finalized. Therefore, carefully ranking courses, with input from family, is a necessary part of the process. All of our courses offer engaging experiences intended to spark new interests. We encourage students to remain open to learning even if they don't get enrolled in their first choice course. Students who do not submit their preferences by the **November 2nd** deadline may not receive one of their top preferences.

COURSE SCHEDULES

Every Intraterm course is unique in its agenda for the day or week. Some courses have included information about days and times in the course description. Pay close attention to these dates, and consider other obligations during that week, as well as travel for the February vacation.

PARTICIPATION & TRANSCRIPT NOTATION

Intraterm experiences are often remarkably noteworthy for our students. We recognize that challenging and fulfilling experiences help create the fabric and resilience of an Upper School student. Four years of Intraterm is a VMS graduation requirement. Intraterm course names will appear on student transcripts, and course comments specific to each student will be written by course leaders and included in students' quarter 3 report cards.

WINTER ATHLETES & SCHEDULE CONFLICTS

Local Intraterm courses can accommodate athletes who train 2-3 mornings during the week of Intraterm. We strongly encourage athletes to participate in a local course if they will be training locally during the week. If athletes are traveling out of state during this week, they will be asked to complete an Independent Study (see page 9). If you are an athlete whose schedule will only interrupt 2-3 days of Intraterm, we suggest you choose a course that is based at VMS and attend as many days as possible. Please double-check your competition schedule to make sure any day-trip travel for your Intraterm course does not conflict with your training/competition schedule. This is important for SSCV athletes, as well as any VMS sports teams competing during February. VMS winter sports may have practices in preparation for playoffs that conflict with the timing of Intraterm travel courses. Please have a conversation with your coach, or Ms. Isom, to double-check your schedule before choosing a travel course for Intraterm. **Our goal is for Intraterm groups to travel together. It poses significant logistical challenges when students request to arrive late or leave early for travel courses.**

Costs & Billing

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

VMS aims to support families currently receiving tuition assistance in defraying Intraterm costs. If you currently receive tuition assistance and would like to apply for Intraterm assistance, **please complete the financial assistance form by 3:15 pm on November 2nd. You will receive notice of financial assistance by November 10th and will be asked to accept or decline the award by November 13th.** Please note that each year there is a set amount of financial assistance funds available. Once we receive student requests, we assign each student a priority based on the following criteria. 1st priority goes to Seniors who haven't received significant aid for Intraterm travel in the past. 2nd priority is to Juniors who haven't received significant aid in the past. The 3rd priority is for the 9th- and 10th-graders who haven't received significant aid in the past. Throughout a student's Upper School career, we aim to support travel by providing financial assistance for at least one course.

BILLING & REFUND POLICY

The Intraterm experiences that are offered in Colorado are at no additional charge to students. Any course that travels out of state will incur a cost. Families must be current with tuition payments to participate in a fee-based course. Courses that require a fee will be billed in two payments (December & March) and are non-refundable. Please be aware that if a student is sick, injured, can't attend the course for any reason, or needs to return earlier than anticipated, the cost of the course and any additional flight changes or fees will be the responsibility of the family. Please see below for information about travel insurance.

International Travel

TRAVEL ADVISORIES & STUDENT SAFETY

VMS views student safety as our primary obligation. As with all our programming, VMS takes all reasonable precautions toward that end. For this reason, VMS monitors the US State Department and International SOS travel advisories, as well as CDC health warnings, regarding security and health concerns for student travel. We are committed to traveling in a way that does not draw attention to our group. We strive to maintain a low profile in a place where we consider ourselves visitors. We work closely with contracted partner organizations that operate in-country and can provide guidance on real-time decisions. As we adhere to the recommendations from the groups outlined above, we will adapt our travel to their advice. This may mean changes to the itinerary to mitigate travel risk. When necessary, we cancel courses due to local or global safety concerns. Additionally, VMS course leaders train in basic first aid/ CPR, understanding student/teacher boundaries, and knowing what it means to be a mandatory reporter. Furthermore, teachers continue to update their knowledge and learn best practices around student mental health, risk management, and travel precautions.

PASSPORTS/ VISAS

It is extremely important that any student wishing to travel internationally has a valid passport that WILL NOT expire within 6 months of their return date from their Intraterm course. If you are planning to travel internationally and do not have a current, valid passport, your family should begin the passport application right away. Depending on where students are traveling, there may be additional fees for Visa requirements. Additional expenses will be billed to the student. Please consult the following website for passport questions: Department of State U.S. Passport Application Information

VACCINES/ IMMUNIZATIONS/ HEALTH CONSULTATION

If you are traveling internationally, we strongly encourage each student to visit a local “travelers' clinic” or health care practitioner who can provide guidance on international travel. (Please consider making an appointment with Colorado Mountain Medical over the December holiday break!) Your healthcare provider will advise students/ families on the best procedures and precautions for maintaining their health. Medical providers can recommend simple, proactive measures to maintain proper gut health while traveling and, if necessary, advise on foods to avoid. The best resource for up-to-date travel and vaccination recommendations is the CDC website, where you can select your destination and view specific medical information. It is recommended that international travelers visit their healthcare provider 4 – 6 weeks before the beginning of their trip to allow time for any medicine to take effect. The cost of immunizations is the responsibility of each family.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is not required, but we strongly recommend families purchase insurance to protect against unexpected circumstances. One of our partner organizations, Students Shoulder to Shoulder, recommends the following organization: TravMark. Families are not required to purchase this insurance and can purchase plans from other providers. If you have questions about the recommended Activity Coverage plan with TravMark, please contact TravMark directly at 877-500-1556. Otherwise, please contact your insurance provider directly with any questions you may have. Please note that each plan is unique, and there are often time-sensitive provisions for when insurance is purchased.

Timeline

OCTOBER

- Intraterm course unveiling to students at Town Meeting on **October 22nd.**
- Families will receive the course catalog and the sign-up Google form on **October 22nd.**

NOVEMBER

- Request for financial aid due via Google Form by **3:15 pm on November 2nd.**
- Students rank-order their choices (top 5) via a Google Form by **3:15 pm on November 2nd.**
- Families receive notice of financial aid award by **November 10th** and are asked to accept or decline the award by **November 13th.**
- Students are notified of course placement via email by **November 13th.**
- 1st group meetings with students and course leaders on **November 17th.**

DECEMBER

- 2nd group meetings with students and course leaders on **December 10th.**

JANUARY

- International travel courses parent and student information meetings on **January 12th.**
- Students will complete service projects locally in their Intraterm groups on **January 18th** in honor of MLK Day.
- 3rd group meetings with students and course leaders on **January 21st.**

FEBRUARY

- 4th group meetings with students and course leaders on **February 2nd.**
- 5th group meetings with students and course leaders on **February 9th.**
- Intraterm begins! Please see individual courses for specifics on the schedule. Please note, some International courses will begin departing as early as **Wednesday, February 10th,** and return on **Friday, February 19th** (the beginning of Feb Break).

MARCH

- 6th group meeting post-course de-brief **March 11th.**
- 7th group meeting post-course application of learning on **March 18th.**

PRE & POST COURSE MEETINGS

Each Intraterm course will meet 8 times between November and March, in addition to the week long course. These meetings are intentionally planned to bring depth and purpose to the Intraterm course experience. Through pre-course meetings, students will learn the context to ground the hands-on experience. Upon return, we will hold post-course meetings for students to transfer learning from their experience into their local community.

Course Offerings

The Upper School Intraterm course offerings are rooted in Vail Mountain School's mission, with the goal of expanding students' knowledge and experience and pushing them into their "growth" zone. Guided by the VMS core values (character, knowledge, community, environment, and leadership), the following courses use varied methodologies, geographic locations, and real-world opportunities to teach students beyond the walls of our building in Vail, Colorado. Looking beyond oneself and weighing ethical and environmental dilemmas in communities, both local and global, is fundamental to the Intraterm experience. Our goal in offering diverse experiences is that students can identify and discuss what it means to be an engaged and ethical citizen of our world. Students will seek to establish an individual purpose and connect with cultures that may not be their own as they navigate challenges, excitement, and discomfort. Working with local and global community partners, we observe, absorb, and act on concepts of environmental stewardship, cultural competency, and ethical leadership.

Local Colorado Courses

- *Skateboard & Longboard Construction: From Design to Product*.....7
- *Food for Thought: A Frontcountry and Backcountry Culinary Journey*.....8
- Why is Vail Called Vail? Highway Engineering & Our Valley.....9
- *Intraterm Independent Study*.....10

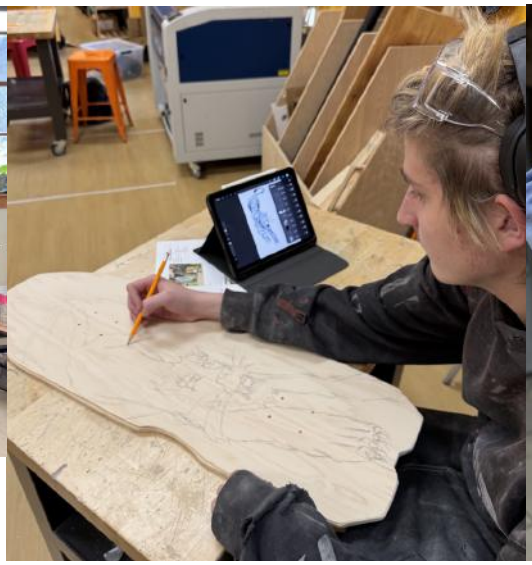
Domestic Travel Courses

- *Community Food Systems in Puerto Rico (Students Shoulder to Shoulder).....11*
- *Wolves of Yellowstone: A Study on Land Management & Ecosystems (Walking Shadows Ecology Tours).....12*
- Wilderness, Water & Conservation: A Look at America's National Parks.....13

International Travel Courses

- *History, Identity & Mandarin Language Immersion in Taiwan (Where There Be Dragons).....14-15*
- *Marine Science in the Sea of Cortez, Mexico (Ecology Project International).....16*
- *Education & Ecotourism in Coastal Panama (Students Shoulder to Shoulder).....17*
- *Marine Conservation Research & Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica (Students Shoulder to Shoulder).....18-19*
- *Spanish Language & Cultural Immersion in Costa Rica (Centro Panamericano de Idiomas).....20*
- *City as a Stage: Where Art Comes to Life in Paris.....21*
- *"La Terra Fortunata:" Conflict, Alpine Heritage & Cultural Identity at the Italian Border..22-23*






Skateboard & Longboard Construction: From Design to Product

***Location**:* VMS & local field trips
***Dates**:* Monday, February 15th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
***Cost**:* Included in VMS Tuition

Students will kick off the hands-on *Gone Boarding* curriculum by dreaming up a custom skateboard or longboard—imagining its purpose, design, and artwork to bring their vision to life. Next, students will bring their vision to life by building their board from start to finish through hands-on, experiential learning. The process ends with students bringing home a handcrafted, functional piece of art—designed to be ridden and enjoyed outdoors! This program is designed to make education more relevant and connected to students' lives through designing, building, and riding boards. Through our weeklong journey, students will work through challenges and celebrate successes together in a collaborative environment with their peers and teachers.

***Character:** Develop perseverance, creativity, and responsibility by taking an idea from concept to completion. | **Knowledge:** Build skills in product design, engineering, woodworking, graphic design, business and marketing, and communication throughout the board creation process. | **Community:** Collaborate with peers and teachers, sharing tools, ideas, and feedback in a supportive workspace. | **Leadership:** Mentor classmates, model safe workshop practices, and take ownership of individual projects. | **Environment:** Cultivate an appreciation for sustainable craftsmanship in the action sports world.*





Food for Thought: A Frontcountry & Backcountry Culinary Journey

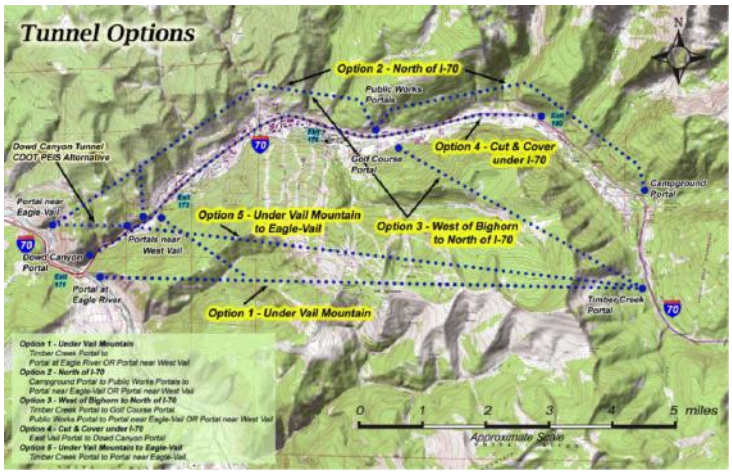
Location: VMS & local field trips (Sangree Hut)
Dates*:* Monday, February 15th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: Included in VMS Tuition

In this hands-on culinary course, students will explore what it takes to plan, prepare, and serve meals for others in both commercial settings and the backcountry. Throughout the week, students will learn from local chefs and catering professionals who will demonstrate essential culinary techniques and share insights into careers in the culinary world. Students will participate in a cooking class focused on food preparation, local sourcing, and adjusting dishes to suit personal tastes. Students will also have the opportunity to speak with and learn from a Food Network chef, learning what goes into producing cooking competition shows. The backcountry demands a different set of culinary skills that students will learn and practice while embarking on a hut trip at Sangree's Hut. As a culminating project, students will put their newfound skills to the test by planning, cooking, and serving a multi-course meal for an invited audience on Friday.

Please note: This course will have an overnight hut trip departing Wednesday morning to Sangree's Hut, returning Thursday afternoon. Students can borrow gear from VMS. All ability levels and methods of winter travel (snowshoe, ski, splitboard) are welcome!

Character: *Build teamwork through the shared challenges of frontcountry and backcountry culinary preparation. |* ***Knowledge:*** *Master essential culinary techniques, commercial kitchen operations, and backcountry nutrition and cooking methods. |* ***Community:*** *Strengthen collaborative bonds and connect with local chefs, hospitality professionals, and invited guests by planning and serving a multi-course meal. |* ***Leadership:*** *Take charge of meal planning, shopping, and kitchen coordination during daily preparation and the overnight hut trip. |* ***Environment:*** *Explore the challenges of local food sourcing during the winter months.*





Why is Vail Called Vail: Highway Engineering & Our Valley

Location: VMS & local field trips
Dates*:* Monday, February 15th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: Included in VMS Tuition

Have you ever wondered how Vail got its name or what it took to carve Interstate 70 through the rugged Rocky Mountains? Students will explore the rich history of our county, town, and state through the lens of civil and highway engineering. Throughout the week, students will participate in field trips and meet with Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) employees and civil engineering experts to gain an insider's look at how I-70 was designed and constructed, and complete engineering challenges to build bridges and concrete forms. By connecting regional history with modern infrastructure, students will discover the pivotal engineering feats, historical decisions, and community impacts that shaped Eagle County and the town of Vail into what they are today.

Character: *Explore "right vs right" decision-making that goes into connecting communities through roads and public transportation projects.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Learn regional history through the lens of civil engineering and highway design, including how Interstate 70 was planned and constructed. Gain practical STEM experience by completing hands-on bridge-building and concrete form challenges.* | ***Community:*** *Engage directly with local CDOT officials, engineers, and mountain historians to understand diverse perspectives on regional development. Develop a deeper appreciation for the civic partnerships required to sustain mountain infrastructure.* | ***Leadership:*** *Practice collaborative problem-solving and decision-making during team engineering simulations. Take the initiative to design and present creative solutions to complex infrastructure problems.* | ***Environment:*** *Evaluate the ecological footprint of major mountain highways and civil engineering projects on fragile Alpine ecosystems. Explore animal-friendly engineering practices to minimize environmental disruption in mountain corridors.*





Intraterm Independent Study

While all upper school students will be enrolled in a week-long Intraterm course, we recognize you may have a commitment that conflicts with your ability to be in Vail during Intraterm.

In lieu of completing an Intraterm course, you will have the opportunity to participate in a volunteer experience of your choosing. This may be applicable to our internal VMS community or our larger Eagle/ Summit County community. To be approved for an Independent Study, you must submit a half-page proposal that outlines which non-profit you are choosing, why it is important to you, and your estimated timeline for completion. Your proposal should also explain how this project connects with the VMS mission statement. In May, during the Academic Symposium, students will present on their project, sharing what they learned with the community.

Students eligible for an Independent Study are those whose winter sport conflicts with the timing of Intraterm. Please note that students must be approved by Matias Doherty & Liana Sideli to complete an Independent Study.





Community Food Systems in Puerto Rico with Students Shoulder to Shoulder

Location: Jayuya, Puerto Rico
Dates: Saturday, February 13th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $4,400 - $4,600 (includes flights)

STUDENTS SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER

Alongside our partner, Fernando Maldonado, you will learn about agritourism, food justice, conservation, and regenerative farming practices while visiting and working on various farms. This program will take you to Patillas, a coastal town in southeastern Puerto Rico, where the mountains meet the coast. While in Patillas, you will learn from local leaders about how they are working to turn Puerto Rico into a thriving agricultural hub through sustainable farming traditions. You will be based at Finca Corsica, a private farm and agricultural project on the coast. You will also visit and work on other farms in the area to learn about the food sovereignty movement in Puerto Rico from various perspectives. You will visit Finca Caribe in Yabucoa, a small-scale farm run by a local family. You will also visit Carite 3.0, a family farm run by Fernando Maldonado, a leader in the food sovereignty movement. In addition, you will have the opportunity to visit a local school and work in their community garden while learning about how local students are getting involved in the agricultural movement. Finally, you will participate in projects at Las Casas de la Selva, a sustainable forestry project located in the mountains of Patillas.

Character: *Practice resilience and ethical decision-making while working through challenges alongside inspiring nonprofit leaders. Build teamwork by living and serving on an off-grid farm.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Explore food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture, and ecological conservation in island communities. Understand how local farming reduces dependence on imports and creates resilient food systems.* | ***Community:*** *Build cross-cultural connections through daily interactions with Puerto Rican farmers and students. Contribute directly to local initiatives that strengthen community resilience and food security.* | ***Leadership:*** *Take initiative on farm tasks, collaborate with local partners, and lead group reflections. Model teamwork and responsible stewardship throughout service projects.* | ***Environment:*** *Evaluate sustainable forestry, regenerative farming, and land conservation practices firsthand. Learn how ecological stewardship protects coastal and mountain ecosystems in Puerto Rico.*

REQUIREMENTS

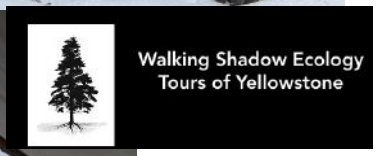
- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**











Wolves of Yellowstone: A Study on Land Management & Ecosystems

***Location**:* Gardiner, MT & Yellowstone National Park
***Dates**:* Sunday, February 14th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
***Cost**:* $2,200 - $2,500 (flights included)

Wolves have been an important part of the West since the first howl crept down the first human's back like a cold trickle of water. These creatures have been vilified, hunted, and despised by those who feared them, and they are also respected, endorsed, and passionately defended by their supporters, who work to re-create an environment that will sustain them. This intraterm will literally take you into the wolves' backyard as we tour Yellowstone, searching for packs with wolf experts from Walking Shadows Ecology Tours of Yellowstone. Each day will include lessons about the wolves, their environment, behaviors, and the distinct packs that make the park their home. We will also visit ranches in the area, both for and against wolves, to get the full perspective on the pros and cons of wolf reintroduction. We will learn from guest speakers who specialize in all types of wolfy behaviors. We will have time to cross-country ski in the area around the northern edge of the park, and get a feel for the vastness and majesty of the first National Park in the United States. Plan on seeing bison, elk, moose, coyotes, and other denizens of Yellowstone. Bring your cameras!

***Character:** Evaluate moral dilemmas surrounding wolf reintroduction while learning to work together as a "pack" and navigate group dynamics during a week of shared living. **| Knowledge:** Explore wolf pack dynamics, conservation, land management, and ecosystem roles with wildlife experts and local stakeholders. **| Community:** Forge strong bonds within the group and engage with local communities to understand how diverse values shape regional policy. | **Leadership:** Practice active listening on controversial conservation topics while taking turns guiding daily field routines and safety. **| Environment:** Observe winter wildlife habitats and examine the balance between human activity and predator populations in Yellowstone's ecosystem.*





Wilderness, Water & Conservation: A Look at America's National Parks

Location: Bryce Canyon & Zion National Parks
Dates: Monday, February 15th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $1,000 - $1,300

84% of the acreage of Zion National Park is managed under the 1964 Wilderness Act. According to the act, *"a wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."*

Travel to the Canyons of Southwestern Utah and explore Bryce Canyon & Zion National Park to learn about land conservation in the United States. View the petroglyphs, slot canyons, hanging gardens, ancient dwellings, and towering sandstone edifices. Students will work with park rangers, talk with water rights lawyers, and former forest service and Bureau of Land Management employees to better understand the two sides of issues surrounding natural resources and the nation's ever-expanding need for private land. Playing and working within the parks will provide insight into the purpose and, often, the controversy surrounding our natural lands, animal management, wildland fires, and water rights. Students will stay at the 4,000-acre Zion Ponderosa Ranch in cabins, enjoy meals together and starry nights in the desert's solitude, and travel to, from, and around Zion via VMS bus. Students should be willing and able to hike, explore, climb, and get a little wet and dirty! Students should bring their positive attitude, flexible nature, and eagerness to explore!

Character: *Learn to prioritize the group while taking responsibility for tasks in a shared living space. Practice flexibility and adaptability through communal living.|* ***Knowledge:*** *Examine how natural resources such as water, minerals, and grazing land are affected by the establishment of national parks. Explore the history of Utah's desert parks and the distinctions between national parks, BLM land, wilderness areas, and national forests. |* ***Community:*** *Understand the controversy surrounding federal land protection and private land ownership, including how these issues affect communities surrounding the parks. |* ***Leadership:*** *Grapple with complex conservation topics while taking initiative and guiding daily hikes through the parks. |* ***Environment****: Experience the fragility of desert landscapes and explore the challenges of protecting and preserving public lands.*





History, Identity & Mandarin Language Immersion in Taiwan with Where There Be Dragons

Location: Taiwan
Dates: Wednesday, February 10th- Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $4,600-$4,800 (flights included)

Taiwan is a small island with enormous diversity, a rich and complex history, and a big impact on regional and global politics. Improve your Mandarin language skills through small group classes, carefully selected homestays, and community engagement while experiencing the rich cultural traditions that thrive in Taiwan. Taiwan has preserved many cultural riches long lost beyond its borders. Settled over millennia by travelers from southwest China, Taiwan was known as the "Beautiful Island" for centuries for its endless seashores and stunning mountains. Amidst a thriving economy, civically engaged democratic system, and cherished Chinese cultural heritage, Taiwan's people are creating a future that weaves together the many threads of their collective past. The group will travel with Where There Be Dragons (WTBD), whose mission is to cultivate meaningful connections through immersive and responsible travel, with a vision to foster a more compassionate, just, and inclusive world.

Throughout this course, VMS students will explore the cultural lifeways of Taiwanese peoples, their cultures, languages and views on democracy, economy, and identity. Students on this course will be immersed in both urban and rural cultures. In Taipei, students interact with social entrepreneurs, artists, and academics to explore emergent political, economic, and environmental themes, while in Yilan, they connect with farmers seeking an alternative to industrial, technologically driven values and systems. Finally, in Yilan, they learn from indigenous culture bearers who steward ancient cultural lifeways about their experience and plight to maintain identity, language, and culture amidst a globalized pressure towards cultural homogeneity. This program is a holistic cultural immersion. VMS students will be deeply engaged with the people and environment that surround them. Open and curious engagement with a carefully guided set of activities will provide students with opportunities to cultivate personal leadership, a deeper sense of self, and a more developed understanding of their place in a global community.

History, Identity & Mandarin Language Immersion in Taiwan, continued...

Character: *Be immersed in a completely new culture and way of being. Navigating the highs and lows of emotions inherent to up-close engagement with a new place and people. Building up the courage to engage with the local population in meaningful ways.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Explore Taiwan's ethnic and ecological diversity as well as its living political history. Learn and improve Mandarin skills through interactions with locals in Taipei, homestay families, and meetings with indigenous people. Opportunities to better understand oneself and one's thoughts, beliefs, and opinions about the larger world.* | ***Community:*** *Experience life in various communities, contrasting the diverse ways of life present in this relatively small island nation. Exposure to different sets of family values, educational practices, and culinary traditions.* | ***Leadership:*** *Practice personal initiative, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication as you navigate immersive daily activities and homestays.* | ***Environment:*** *Students will observe and analyze diverse landscapes, from urban centers to sustainable rural farms and indigenous lands, gaining insight into local environmental stewardship.*

REQUIREMENTS

- Students must be currently enrolled in a Mandarin Chinese class. (Exceptions can be discussed for students who have taken multiple years of Mandarin, but are not enrolled this year.)
- Valid passport is required. Please ensure your passport does not expire within 6 months of our travel days.
- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**





Marine Science in the Sea of Cortez with Ecology Project International

Location: La Paz Mexico, Espiritu Santo Island, Sea of Cortez
Dates: Friday, February 12th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $4,400 - $4,600 (flights included)

Snorkel in the sky-blue waters of the Sea of Cortez, Mexico, as you work alongside research scientists from Ecology Project International (EPI) studying vertebrate and invertebrate marine organisms. The Sea of Cortez is rich with life and home to more than 900 species of fish! While you stay a few nights in coastal La Paz and camp on Espiritu Santo Island, you'll collect data during snorkel surveys on marine organisms like the crown of thorns sea star that is consuming the rocky coral reef due to imbalances in the ecosystem. Species richness and abundance data will also be collected as you contribute to the REEF database of Baja fish species. You'll also spend time swimming with sea lions as you learn about local conservation efforts to protect these organisms using sustainable tourism practices. During this course, you'll have many opportunities to hear stories from our guides (and even local high school peers) about what marine science, sustainability, and conservation mean in local Mexican communities. Be prepared to gain an appreciation of how diverse and beautiful our world is through numerous hands-on experiences in Baja.

Character: *Develop the ecological knowledge needed to understand conservation systems, strategies, and challenges, inspiring a lifelong commitment to personal or active conservation.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Gain firsthand experience with global and local ecological concepts through approximately 20 hours of authentic conservation field research. An additional opportunity to earn college service-learning credit at MSU is available by completing optional pre- and post-course work.* | ***Community:*** *Develop skills to collect underwater data and document marine invertebrate and fish species for the broader scientific community. Design an independent research project and present findings on the final day of the course.* | ***Leadership:*** *Take initiative in completing field research tasks and guide peer collaboration during group data collection.* | ***Environment:*** *Explore diverse marine habitats firsthand and deepen an understanding of ecological stewardship in coastal Baja.*

REQUIREMENTS

- Students should be comfortable in the cold ocean for long periods (wetsuits and PFDs provided).
- Students should feel comfortable camping on a beach in primitive conditions.
- Students must meet paperwork deadlines and requirements to support EPI's safety protocols.
- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**







Education & Ecotourism in Coastal Panama with Students Shoulder to Shoulder

Location: Bocas del Toro, Panama & surrounding islands
Dates: Saturday, February 13th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $4,400 - $4,600 (includes flights)

This program will immerse you in the incredible archipelago of Bocas del Toro, where you will explore coral reefs, mangroves, and rainforests, and support the afterschool centers run by Give and Surf. Your mornings will focus on learning about climate change, marine conservation, and the area's unique ecosystems from local nonprofit conservation leaders. In the afternoons, you will work in after-school centers, connecting with the Afro-Caribbean and indigenous Ngobe communities. Your work at the after-school centers will focus on supporting local teachers by engaging students in play-based learning activities. Along the way, you will be immersed in Spanish, connect with local residents, and explore the impact of tourism and climate change in Bocas Del Toro.

Character: *Practice speaking Spanish while meeting with residents and nonprofit leaders. Develop an understanding of ethical leadership and strengthen leadership skills by facilitating workshops for local children.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Experience the rich biodiversity of the Bocas del Toro archipelago and visit a local Indigenous community to learn about land conservation.* | ***Community:*** *Collaborate with peers to support teachers at after-school centers by leading workshops for local children.* | ***Leadership:*** *Develop personal initiative and teamwork by planning and delivering educational workshops for local students.* | ***Environment:*** *Evaluate fragile coastal ecosystems and explore how local ecotourism initiatives balance environmental protection with community needs.*

REQUIREMENTS

- Students must attend mandatory pre-trip meetings to prepare for this experience.
- There is no language requirement to join this program. An understanding of Spanish will be helpful, but there will be translation for those who do not speak Spanish fluently.
- Students must have a valid passport. Please ensure your passport does not expire within six months of our travel days.
- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**





Marine Conservation Research & Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica with Students Shoulder to Shoulder

Location: Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica
Dates: Friday, February 12th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $4,400 - $4,600 (includes flights)

Alongside our partner, Turtle Trax, you will learn about sea turtle conservation and coastal ecosystems while gaining hands-on research experience in the remote southern Nicoya Península. This program is designed to help you understand the connections between community empowerment, biodiversity protection, and sustainable tourism while gaining hands-on research experience. You will leave Costa Rica with field research skills and a new perspective on how conservation programs can provide economic opportunities for rural communities while protecting endangered species. Located on the extreme southern tip of Costa Rica, the Nicoya Peninsula in the Cabo Blanco Nature Reserve is a critical region for marine biology and conservation due to its rich coastal biodiversity and unique ecosystems. It borders the Pacific Ocean and includes important marine habitats like mangroves, coral reefs, estuaries, and sea turtle nesting beaches. The area is part of several marine protected areas (MPAs), including Cabo Blanco Nature Reserve, the first National Park created in Costa Rica. While on the Nicoya Peninsula, students will be actively involved in ongoing marine biology projects (tagging of rays and sea turtles). They will support a local team of researchers in conducting marine conservation research and also learn about local community projects that are helping to protect and conserve the local environment.

Character: *Develop an understanding of ethical leadership by working with inspiring nonprofit leaders.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Support a research team's conservation efforts at a biological research station while exploring ocean conservation, ecotourism, and climate change. Gain Spanish language experience through daily interactions with locals.* | ***Community:*** *Experience rural Costa Rican life and explore rural tourism alongside local leaders.* | ***Leadership:*** *Practice personal initiative and teamwork by guiding field research tasks and collaborating with local conservationists.* | ***Environment:*** *Observe fragile coastal ecosystems and deepen an understanding of how local stewardship helps protect endangered marine species.*

Marine Conservation Research & Sustainable Tourism in Costa Rica with Students Shoulder to Shoulder, continued...

REQUIREMENTS

- There is no language requirement to join this program. An understanding of Spanish will be helpful, but there will be translation for those who do not speak Spanish fluently.
- Students must have a valid passport. Please ensure your passport does not expire within six months of our travel days.
- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**





Spanish Language & Cultural Immersion in Costa Rica with Centro Pan Americano de Idiomas

Location: San Joaquin, Costa Rica
Dates: Friday, February 12th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $3,200 - $3,400 (includes flights)

This course puts students in a position to practice the Spanish they've learned in the classroom. It also gives students a real-life context, providing added incentive to master the language. Outside of the realm of language learning, this course provides a space in which students can, and do, gain independence, enabling students to explore another culture in an authentic way. In addition to Spanish classes, students will take Latin dance and cooking classes, explore local parks, beaches, and markets, and learn about Costa Rican culture. The group will be hosted by CPI (Centro Pan Americano de Idiomas), a well-respected language school in Costa Rica. Another important element is the homestay in San Joaquin arranged through CPI. Families are carefully selected and screened for their flexibility, warmth, and ability to connect with young language students. Pura Vida!

Character: *Develop independence and global citizenship by living with locals and participating in service and language learning.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Strengthen language proficiency through daily classes and a full-immersion experience, including a homestay with a local family and regular interaction with locals.* | ***Community:*** *Build a lifelong connection to the Spanish language by immersing in one of the cultures in which it is spoken and experiencing firsthand the practical benefits of being bilingual.* | ***Leadership:*** *Practice personal initiative by communicating in Spanish throughout the homestay experience.* | ***Environment:*** *Develop an appreciation for the local Costa Rican community and culture while living there for the week.*

REQUIREMENTS

- Open to all levels of Spanish in 9th - 12th grade.
- Students must be currently enrolled in a Spanish language class or have Spanish fluency.
- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**
- A valid passport is required. Please ensure your passport does not expire within 6 months of our travel days.





City as a Stage: Where Art Comes to Life in Paris

Location: Paris, France
Dates: Saturday, February 13th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $3,500 - $3,800 (includes flights)

This course offers students an opportunity to experience Paris through its rich traditions of theatre, music, dance, visual arts, architecture, museums, and cultural institutions. Through firsthand experiences, students will explore how the arts reflect and shape history, culture, and society while developing their creativity, curiosity, and confidence. Students will take ownership of their experience by navigating new challenges, making thoughtful decisions, collaborating with others, and using their artistic voices to engage with the world around them. Students will participate in both an immersive theater class and a visual arts class. Students will engage with exhibitions and cultural experiences that explore the lives, perspectives, and challenges of Parisian teenagers. And through a partnership with Serve the City, students will also participate in meaningful service-learning experiences that connect them more deeply to the people and community of Paris. This course will inspire students to return home with greater knowledge, stronger community connections, and the confidence to lead through creativity, curiosity, service, and meaningful experiences.

Character: *Step outside of comfort zones, navigate a new culture, and approach unfamiliar experiences with curiosity, respect, flexibility, and confidence.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Through workshops, performances, museums, shared meals, and exploration of Paris, develop an appreciation for perspectives different from their own while strengthening relationships within the VMS community.* | ***Community: E****xperience art's power to bring people and communities together. Reflect on individual identities as people and artists through exposure to different artistic traditions and perspectives.* | ***Leadership:*** *Take initiative in navigating new cultural environments and lead peer discussions on creative self-expression.* | ***Environment:*** *Explore how Parisian urban spaces, architecture, and cultural institutions shape artistic expression and community engagement.*

REQUIREMENTS

- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**
- A valid passport is required. Please ensure your passport does not expire within 6 months of our travel days.



"La Terra Fortunata:" Conflict, Alpine Heritage & Cultural Identity at the Italian Border

Location: Udine & Valbruna, Italy
Dates: Thursday, February 11th - Friday, February 19th, 2027
Cost: $3,800 - $4,000 (includes flights)

Buon Giorno! Welcome to the Friuli region of Italy, where we will travel from the Adriatic coast to the Alps. This course will explore centuries of culture, history, and cuisine at a unique European crossroads where Latin, Slavic, and Germanic influences collide. Students will metaphorically put their feet into the boots of soldiers from both World Wars, in the types of battles that defined our own 10th Mountain heritage. From the ancient architecture and World Heritage sites of Aquileia to historical WWI and WWII battlefields, students will experience local traditions, coastal fishing heritage, and artisanal foods such as San Daniele prosciutto and regional cheeses. Because this area was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for centuries, and borders both Austria and Slovenia, it often feels less like typical Italy and more like a distinct, multi-layered European territory.

Character: *Confront difficult issues of discrimination, authoritarianism, crumbling infrastructure, and ways of life shaped by human and natural influences. Weigh moral dilemmas from the past, present, and future.* | ***Community:*** *Explore how communities have survived and thrived in the face of governmental decisions by studying the impact of both World Wars on the region.* | ***Knowledge:*** *Examine historical connections ranging from present-day adaptations to climate change and UNESCO World Heritage Sites to ancient architecture and the foods that have sustained tourists and locals for hundreds of years.* | ***Leadership:*** *Take the initiative to navigate cross-cultural communication and guide peer reflections on historical and contemporary societal challenges.* | ***Environment:*** *Explore how alpine and coastal ecosystems in Friuli have shaped the region.*

REQUIREMENTS

- Students must attend mandatory pre-course meetings to prepare for this experience. **There will be a parent/student pre-course information meeting on Tuesday, January 12th from 4-5 pm.**
- A valid passport is required. Please ensure your passport does not expire within 6 months of our travel days.