

Touring Other Countries

There are a lot of opportunities to travel to other countries while playing softball. I have traveled to Canada, Germany, Australia, France, the Netherlands and Japan while coaching a team or doing clinics, and I am glad that I went to all of them.

I have found that going with a team has been a wonderful way to visit these countries, learn about the cultures of these countries, and learn about their players and coaches, also. It is really interesting to talk softball with the coaches. I know that I could have gone either with a few friends or on a non-softball group tour, but going with a team gets me closer to the people from other countries and it lets me see what the foreign players and the country are really about.

It is really fun to see our players trying to converse with the foreign players and share things about each other's country. Most players from other countries can speak English, where most Americans cannot speak anything except English. That puts us traveling in different countries at a distinct disadvantage. We found, while traveling, this past summer, to Paris, that some of the Parisians can speak English but choose to pretend that they cannot speak it to American travelers and they are not very friendly. But the Parisian players and coaches were more than accommodating and very friendly. I have taken some players a couple of times to Europe and they all have said that they still email foreign players that they have met in the past.

There are different ways to take a team to another country.

1. One way is to set up the trip on your own by researching teams and coaches in the countries that you would like to play in and then contacting them for games. If you are an NFCA member, you receive a book with all of the members and their information in it, which includes some of the international coaches and affiliates.
2. Another way is to go through the National Team Programs of those countries and seek their help in getting names, etc., so you can call the teams for games. In either case, you will also have to research names of hotels/hostels and make the reservations, get directions to anywhere you want to go in that country, get names of a transportation company (for travel to the games, to and from the airport, for sightseeing tours, to restaurants and anywhere else that you want to travel to in the country), schedule the games, schedule the sightseeing tours, schedule the airline reservations and the rest of the normal things a coach does for the team when on an away trip.
3. Another way is to contact a company that does all of this for you. I go with Worldsport and Dave Eby, out of Los Angeles. He will make all of the arrangements for your team to whatever country you want. Dave sets a price for whatever country that you have chosen to go to and then does all of the work and makes all of the reservations. He provides the following:

All airplane reservations from the players' home airport to a central airport. All team members fly into the central airport and then on to the destination together. This year I flew from St. Louis, MO, to Newark, NJ, met the team, and then on to Paris together. If you are taking a set team from your home area, then you would fly together from the beginning.

All hotel or hostel accommodations. Many European hostels are very nice, with great food prepared for their guests. This keeps the cost down and since you will be in the room only a short time each day to sleep, it may make the trip more affordable.

All transportation needed within the country to games, restaurants, sightseeing, etc. We traveled in a tour bus most of the time, but in Apeldoorn in Holland, we had bikes. The field was walking distance right across the road from our accommodations, and we each had a bike to go to town and to a few of the sightseeing spots. Everyone loved the bikes, even the parents. Another group had a bus in Apeldoorn, but that meant everyone had to leave at the same time, go to the same places and they couldn't just go to a store to pick up something that they needed. We could go shopping in town or down the street to the supermarket at any time. The bikes were a lot of fun and easy to ride.

Apeldoorn was much safer to ride in than most U.S. cities.

All game schedules and all sightseeing tours.

Two meals a day.

A guide, from the country visited, for most sightseeing tours, who would give the players a real insight into the culture and life of the people from that country.

All team uniforms, travel bag, jacket, sweatshirt, T, visor and socks, plus all costs involved with the games.

Information about how to get passports, how to prepare for a trip to another country, what to take, how to exchange money and lots more about traveling to another country.

Basically, you just go and coach the team—Dave has everything else arranged for you.

For coaches, it is a great time to scout for foreign players. There are a lot of players in other countries who would love to come over to the United States to play and go to school. It is not as hard as you think to get them to come over. They are willing to come for little money and most of them play very hard while over here. When I was at Meramec, I had, through the years, eleven from Canada, one from Germany and three from the Netherlands. I saw a player in Australia who is coming this year to my old school. So, consider taking a group over with any of the numerous companies that offer this service, or schedule the trip on your own. It is a great learning experience for all of you and a lot of fun.