



Journeys by Jay (Schmidt, Class X)

My name is Jay Schmidt, from Plainview, Minn. I am a Class X participant and have decided to make a change in my career. I will still be working in Agriculture, however, on a little different avenue. My goal is to concentrate on Agriculture by educating the public where and how food is produced. In June 2019, I quit my job at a dairy equipment dealership and made the switch to completely focus on tourism. *Journeys by Jay* has become a reality.

In May 2017, I became certified as Tour Director from International Tour Management Institute, (ITMI) in Boston, Mass. It was a two-week certification course. I learned all the behind-the-scenes issues that make a successful tour. Things one never thinks about as a participant.... anything from setting up the tour stop times, to the logistics of stopping for a bathroom break.

Ag Tours are increasing in popularity. I led a group of New Zealand farmers across the Upper Midwest in June. They covered 3,000 miles, 6 states, 10 different farms and two tractor assembly plants, with a variety of touristy stops in between. They also listened to a presentation from Sam Ziegler, Class VII, with GreenSeam in Mankato. In November 2017, I guided a group of ag college students from Denmark through California's San Joaquin Valley.

To hone skills as a Tour Director, I worked in Washington DC leading student tours. I spent two "student tour seasons" in DC. The student season is generally early spring through June. With my regular job in the dairy equipment industry, I could only work a limited number of tours in DC. Now with the full-time tour focus, I will concentrate on filling my calendar with tours.

I can help groups looking to tour a large variety of options. Groups wanting to attend a Twins game or attend an out-of-town Vikings game will be happy to have me make all the arrangements. Currently I am working on a group tour to the Holy Lands in February of 2021. On the schedule now is a trip from Chicago to Los Angeles via Route 66. Other trips on the calendar are a trip to Germany for the Passion Play in August of 2020 and an African Safari in June of 2021. I am especially excited about the MARL trip to Cambodia and Taiwan in February 2020.

MARL has played a big part of this transition. I believe the leadership and communication skills I have learned so far in MARL have helped me to be able to work with a wide variety of demographics. The network gained in MARL has also played a large role in this move. The support and advice from many MARL alumni and board members have helped me gain perspective.

Working with other tour operators has also helped with the legal logistics of travel. I work as an independent contractor as well as tour operator. I hope to make this a full-time devotion. It is not really a job if you enjoy it that much. Currently the calendar is not full. In-between tours, I use my CDL and drive over-the-road semi-truck while using my down time to network and create new tour ideas.

My daughter Angalee is also trained in tourism. We talk extensively regarding the industry and in building opportunities for both of our careers. We have each built a great network within the industry. I have become the Ag "go-to" guy for other Tour Directors. ITMI has asked me to look at an Ag Tourism piece for future classes. Maybe someday, Angalee and I can make it a family business.