

Our Story

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The Leader in Educational Travel for Adults Since 1975

It all started as a conversation between friends.

In the early 1970s, Marty Knowlton, hired as the director of the University of New Hampshire's youth hostel program, had just returned from four years of backpacking through Europe. Sharing tales of his travels with longtime friend David Bianco, who was the university's director of residential life, Knowlton stressed how impressed he was with Europe's youth hostels and with the Scandinavian tradition of "folk schools" for adults.

They couldn't help but wonder: Why aren't there more opportunities for American adults to travel and learn? And why don't Americans have more options for staying active and engaged in retirement?

The two hatched an idea to offer courses for students over 60 to engage with faculty and stay in unused dorm rooms in the summer. Inspiration hit Bianco when he glimpsed the white-bearded Knowlton sitting beneath a sign that read: "Youth Hostel."

"This campus ought not to be having a youth hostel — it ought to be having an elder hostel!" Bianco exclaimed.

Elderhostel to Road Scholar

The organization's original name was born: Founded as Elderhostel in the summer of 1975, Road Scholar began as a learning program conceived to combine not-for-credit classes with inexpensive lodging for older adults. Five New England colleges offered the first programs to 220 pioneering participants in the first year.

By 1980, gaining momentum primarily through word-of-mouth, more than 20,000 adults had experienced a learning adventure with us in all 50 states and most of Canada. In 1981, we introduced the first international programs in Great Britain and Scandinavia. By 2010, more than 4 million adults had taken Elderhostel programs, and the organization re-branded with a new name: Road Scholar.

Road Scholar Today

Today, Road Scholar offers 5,500 learning adventures, serving more than 100,000 participants annually. Our programs combine travel and education to provide experiential learning opportunities featuring an extraordinary range of topics, formats and locations, in every state in the U.S., 150 countries and aboard ships on rivers and oceans worldwide.

While the "hostel" lodging of long ago has given way to today's more comfortable accommodations, Road Scholar strives to always remain true to our roots.

Today, we continue designing programs that foster a sense of community and camaraderie — only fitting for an organization that started as a chat between friends.