SPRING 2026 – SOUTHEAST ASIA TOUR REPORT

Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia

February 22 – March 21, 2026

OVERVIEW

The AEO Tour – Spring 2026 Southeast Asia tours visited 7 countries and 13 cities (Philippines – Manila / Singapore / Indonesia – Jakarta, Surabaya, Bali / Thailand – Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket / Malaysia – Kuala Lumpur / Vietnam – Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hanoi / Cambodia – Phnom Penh). We had 65 USA University Fairs, met over 4,400 students, and collected over 3,000 student leads for our participating universities and colleges. We celebrated our 40th year in business and it was one of the most effective and enjoyable tours we have ever conducted. To increase the ROI of the tour and to give back, we ran a drawing to give away an iPad Pro to one student that registered at the fairs and the results were incredible!

Below is a summary of each of the countries we visited this Spring.

MANILA, PHILIPPINES: Feb. 22–23

The group arrived on Sunday night and most of us went out to eat a nice Filipino meal together near the hotel. The first official day of the tour started off with a highly productive and well-executed day! We visited 4 schools for university fairs and the turnout at each school was strong! We visited a nice variety of schools that included Catholic schools, a Christian school, and an international school. One of the schools we visited never had a group of USA universities and colleges visit for a fair before and they were very grateful for the experience! Scheduling 4 school fairs and flying to Singapore in one day is ambitious, but we were on time for everything and the schedule was perfect. The group worked extremely hard and the tour was off to a strong start!

Statistics: Manila - Philippines

Participating institutions	9: 8 states represented, 1 international
Number of 4-year colleges	8
Number of 2-year colleges	1
Number of school fairs	4
Total students that participated	219
Total student leads generated	147

SINGAPORE: Feb. 23–24

We were only in Singapore less than 24 hours, but we had 3 school fairs, a "Study in the USA" workshop with parents, experienced lunch at my favorite hawker station, and we even had time to explore the Gardens by the Bay! A few of the group members did a fantastic job presenting to a large group of parents and students about the USA education system, the role of community colleges, how to best apply, and gave tips for parents to best help their students. Attendance was excellent and the counselors were very appreciative of the visit. Singapore often gets overlooked by tour groups or universities, because the cost is expensive and certain schools have the reputation of being quite selective. Having spent extensive time in Singapore over the last 10 years, I am able to create a schedule where we can visit a variety of schools that have students that can afford to study overseas and are open to learning about new opportunities. We sure packed a lot into the day, but it was worth it! That evening, we flew to Jakarta.

Statistics: Singapore

Participating institutions	9: 8 states represented, 1 international
Number of 4-year colleges	8
Number of 2-year colleges	1
Number of school fairs	3
Total students that participated	114
Total student leads generated	49

INDONESIA (JAKARTA, SURABAYA, BALI): Feb. 24 – March 2

Indonesia was one of our longest stops on the tour and it was incredible! We arrived late at night on February 24 and didn't have much time to rest as we left early the next morning for 3 school fairs. We had a strong day at 3 very different schools. We were able to have busy fairs, meet with parents, network with counselors, and give 2 presentations about the advantages of studying in the USA and how to prepare the USA application. After the first day, we finally had the night off to catch up on much needed rest. The second day, we had 2 busy school fairs and then traveled to Surabaya in the evening.

We were in Surabaya for less than 24 hours and successfully held 3 university fairs at 3 of the best schools in Surabaya. We are one of the few groups that visits Surabaya consistently and the relationship AEO Tour has with the schools is incredible. In the late afternoon, we flew to Bali to start our 3rd Annual SE Asia Counselor Networking Retreat!

Bali is always a great stop on the Spring Tour! We kicked off our 3rd Annual SE Asia Counselor Networking Retreat on February 27 and invited 10 outstanding school counselors from Bali, Bangkok, Brunei, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Siem Reap, and Surabaya. We had a wonderful dinner on the beach the opening night and got to meet and network with everyone. On February 28, we had a speed-networking session, breakoffs for counselors and recruiters to freely brainstorm, talk, and learn from each other, and then we had our final session where we could have an open forum discussion about the challenges and opportunities that impact all our jobs. After, we capped off the morning sessions with a wonderful catered lunch. That evening we had an outstanding family dinner at the resort. It was a fantastic retreat and it was our best one yet! The retreat created genuine, meaningful exchanges — counselors & recruiters shared challenges, solutions, and insights in a spirit of real collaboration. Friendships deepened, professional growth happened, and the whole experience reminded us why we do this work.

The counselors flew home on March 1 and the recruiters enjoyed the day off. On March 2, we checked out and had 2 school fairs in Bali. At the first school, we had a fair and gave a presentation to students about studying in the USA. At the second school, all the reps gave workshops on a variety of topics and we held a fair after. We were sad to leave Bali, but we maximized every day and I think we all came out of Bali more connected, hopeful, and confident in our respective positions in international education. After the last visit, the group flew to Bangkok in the evening.

Statistics: Jakarta, Surabaya, Bali - Indonesia

Participating institutions	13: 11 states represented, 1 international
Number of 4-year colleges	12
Number of 2-year colleges	1
Number of school fairs	10
Total students that participated	719
Total student leads generated	381

THAILAND (BANGKOK, CHIANG MAI, PHUKET): March 2–8

We arrived late in Bangkok and were grateful for a slightly later start the next morning. We had 2 school fairs the first day and they were both busy. We enjoyed a few hours in the afternoon to catch up on work and rest before having a fun counselor dinner at the best buffet in the world – The Goji Bar. The following day was highly productive again as we had 3 wonderful school fairs and flew to Chiang Mai in the evening. The first 2 fairs were highly productive and included all the grade 9-11 students. The last fair was a little slower, but it was still nice to visit. The group did an amazing job and kept the energy up throughout it all.

We arrived in Chiang Mai around 7pm and most of us went out to have dinner at a local Michelin-rated restaurant. We had a fun time getting to know one another better and enjoying a rare free night. On March 5, we had our busiest day of the tour as we left the hotel at 7:05am, participated in 5 highly productive school fairs and held a counselor dinner at the hotel later that night. The group put in a 14-hour workday and I was impressed with everyone! I know it wasn't easy, but everyone was remarkable!

On March 6, we checked out at 4:20am and flew to Phuket. As soon as we landed, we drove straight to 2 very busy school fairs! The first school had never held a university fair before and the students were outstanding and so interested in learning about the USA! It was awesome and one of our favorite schools! After the second fair, we drove to our hotel, checked in, relaxed, and had a group dinner at a local Thai restaurant. The week was extremely busy, but super-productive and highly rewarding!

On Saturday, March 7, I treated everyone to a day trip to the Phi Phi Islands for team building and to thank them for all their hard work on the first half of the Southeast Asia tour circuit!

The group checked out on Sunday, March 8 and most went their separate ways and those continuing traveled with me to Kuala Lumpur.

Statistics: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket - Thailand

Participating institutions	10: 9 states represented
Number of 4-year colleges	9
Number of 2-year colleges	1
Number of school fairs	12
Total students that participated	811
Total student leads generated	517

MALAYSIA (KUALA LUMPUR): March 8–11

We arrived in Kuala Lumpur late Sunday evening and were out the door by 7:00am Monday morning for our first school fair. We had 4 university fairs at various international schools around Kuala Lumpur and all were very successful. That night we had our largest counselor dinner with 16 counselors attending!

The next day we left at 7:00am again and had another 4 university fairs at top high schools. I invited EducationUSA to attend one of the fairs so they could network with the participating universities and colleges and it was very productive. The final school of the day, we had a parent workshop and presented about the role of community colleges in the USA. When we returned, the group enjoyed a free night and many of us went to a Yemeni restaurant and explored a beautiful landmark in KL.

For our final day in Kuala Lumpur, we had 3 fairs at the biggest 2-year colleges in KL. The prospective students are enrolled in the American Degree Transfer Programs or ADTP and they are all interested in studying in the USA. Due to heavy traffic on our way to the third school, the group had to split and half the group participated in the last fair and the other half departed for Ho Chi Minh City.

Statistics: Malaysia

Participating institutions	13: 10 states represented
Number of 4-year colleges	12
Number of 2-year colleges	1
Number of school fairs	12
Total students that participated	752
Total student leads generated	539

VIETNAM (HO CHI MINH CITY, DA NANG, HANOI): March 11–18

Vietnam was once again one of the highlights of the tour. Our group in HCMC was large and the energy was high from the start. For our first day, we met at 6:40am and set out for 6 school fairs! The group put on a masterclass in efficiency and productivity! Everyone was on their A-game, on time, set up fast, packed up fast, worked hard, had fun, and we made the most of every minute! We were on time for all the fairs and our planning and teamwork paid off. I was so proud of the group and did my best to keep them hydrated, fed, and happy throughout the day! It was a memorable day that we will never forget! The group enjoyed a well-deserved free night and many of us went out to the world-famous Rico Taco for dinner!

On Friday, March 13, we departed at 7:00am and had 4 school fairs, followed by a very large and fun group dinner with counselors. It was another 14-hour day for the group and everyone worked exceptionally hard and maintained a positive attitude throughout! The students from both days were enthusiastic, engaged, and interested in studying in the USA. It was one of our most productive stops in HCMC that we have ever had!

On Saturday, March 14, we finally had a chance to sleep in and departed for beautiful Da Nang. The group had an outstanding time in Da Nang and enjoyed the free night in Hoi An. On Sunday, we had the day off and finished the night off with a large group dinner on the beach!

We had 1 school fair in Da Nang on March 15 and there were around 200 students that attended. The school was very grateful for our visit and it was a positive experience as Da Nang doesn't get a lot of visitors. We flew to Hanoi that afternoon.

Our first day in Hanoi we had a highly productive day with 4 school fairs and another great counselor dinner! 11 counselors showed up and it was a fun night of laughs, networking, and delicious food. The final day in Hanoi, we had 3 school fairs and they were all highly productive! We returned to the hotel and dropped off most of the group and many of us went to get the famous bun cha before heading to the airport for our flight to Phnom Penh. Everyone had such a wonderful time in Vietnam and we bonded through the craziness and intensity of the schedule.

Statistics: Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hanoi - Vietnam

Participating institutions	23: 16 states represented
Number of 4-year colleges	18
Number of 2-year colleges	5
Number of school fairs	18
Total students that participated	1,317
Total student leads generated	540

CAMBODIA (PHNOM PENH): March 18–21

The group arrived in Phnom Penh very late in the evening of March 18 and checked into the hotel. Due to a last-minute cancelation from the first school, we were able to sleep in a little. We had 3 highly productive school fairs on the first day and finished the night with a tremendous counselor dinner in which 12 counselors attended. It was our best counselor dinner in Phnom Penh and the numbers increase each semester.

For our final working day of the tour, we had 4 school fairs and the first fair had 200+ students that attended. It really pushed the group to finish strong and they did an incredible job! The other fairs weren't quite as busy, but they were still positive experiences! To finish the night, most of the group joined at the best noodle restaurant near the hotel and enjoyed a fun night together! One of the group members, Thalia, is retiring this year and we had a special tribute to her. We all love her so much and appreciate all she has done in this field!

On Saturday, March 21, many of us had breakfast together and all departed our separate ways. A few of us helped with our livestream announcement of the winner of the iPad Pro giveaway and it was a lot of fun!

Statistics: Phnom Penh - Cambodia

Participating institutions	11: 8 states represented
Number of 4-year colleges	6
Number of 2-year colleges	5
Number of school fairs	7
Total students that participated	575
Total student leads generated	568

FINAL THOUGHTS

Every year I come back from this tour with the same feeling: deep gratitude. Gratitude for the schools and counselors who open their doors to us. Gratitude for the students who show up with curiosity and ambition. And most of all, gratitude for the group of university and college recruiters— for showing up every day with energy, professionalism, and genuine care for one another. It was our most effective season of tours we have ever conducted and I am confident that when it comes to travel in SE Asia, there is no stronger ROI than an AEO Tour!

This tour is more than a recruitment trip. It's a reminder that relationships are the foundation of everything we do in international education. The connections made on this tour — between the recruiters, counselors, and students — have a ripple effect that lasts long after we've said our goodbyes at the airport.

Thank you for being exactly who you are. For bringing your authentic selves every single day, even when you were running on four hours of sleep and were super jet-lagged. You represented your institutions beautifully and made this tour everything it is.

Safe travels home. Keep up the great work! Always stay grateful for the opportunity we have to do this work – it's life-changing! The world needs people like you in it and I am so grateful you are in the AEO Family! Personally, I believe there is no limit to the good times, the adventures, the love, and the growth – thank you for proving that to be true once again! I hope to see you all soon and thank you so much for joining the AEO Tour!

Much love,

Ben Wilkey
Tour Helper Man
AEO Tour