

## Go Green Tours

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**Art- and eco-themed bus tours for adults, families, and teens.**

In 1980, a teenaged Arlesia Crooms boarded a Boys and Girls Club bus for a Christian retreat that stopped in New England's Amish Country and Quebec, Canada. It was her first trip outside of the US. Venturing beyond her Newark, NJ, inner-city home, Crooms took a leap to the unfamiliar.

As she traversed the multicultural city of Montreal, Quebec, and observed the flowing waters of Niagara Falls, Crooms was taken aback.

"I said, 'Wow, how great is it to see the world,'" she recalls. "That's when my passion [for travel] really started."

Crooms is the founder and owner of Go Green Tours (p. 115), an Atlanta, GA-based company that specializes in eco-themed individual and group bus tours in the eastern United States. The tours feature stops at green conferences, sustainable communities, farm-to-table restaurants, fine art galleries, and more.

The company also offers a youth summer program called Social Environmentally Economically (SEE) Green, which takes children outside of their normal surrounds, much like the Boys and Girls Club did for her.

In 1995, 15 years after her high school trip, Crooms' enthusiasm for travel drove her to a career in hospitality and tourism, but it was not until 2009 when she strolled through the Green Festival, formerly co-owned by Green America, in Washington, DC, that she was inspired to combine her work with her desire to protect the environment.

"I was just elated," Crooms says. "I wanted to figure out how I could bring people from different states to the Green Festival."

The national expo, which ended in 2017, united sustainable businesses, speakers, and exhibits to promote environmental consciousness. The DC festival was Crooms' first exposure to the idea of combining sustainability and faith. She was fascinated that spiritual leaders from all walks of life—imams, bishops, and rabbis—were all together at peace and dedicated to green living.

"I was literally just blown away," Crooms says. "I just thought it was the coolest thing."

Crooms wanted to share her newfound understanding—that environmentalism could be both a part of one's spiritual practice and one's career—with others. A year later, in 2010, Crooms founded Go Green Tours.

When planning her company's multi-day bus tours, she asks herself, "How do I encompass green initiatives and art initiatives as well as making sure that our youth are being connected to green and sustainability?"

In the SEE Green summer trip to Atlanta, Crooms' passion for both art and sustainability is evident. The trip includes a theater show, a farm tour, and a visit to the Gwinnet



Top left: Go Green Tours owner Arlesia Crooms. Right: A boardwalk in Georgia's Pinizy Swamp Nature Park, a stop for students on one of the company's SEE Green summer trips for teens.

Environmental and Heritage Center, which links sustainability and culture, and boasts Georgia's first LEED certified building. The teens also spend a day at Serenbe, a planned sustainable community near Atlanta.

"It was letting them see [things like], 'Do you realize that parking meter is running on solar panels?'" Crooms says. "It's introducing them to a world that they had never even known."

Family and adult trips also stress art and environmental awareness. On a two-day trip from Atlanta to Augusta, GA, the bus makes stops at an art gallery and the Pinizy Center for Water Science, among other destinations.

Based out of a swamp in downtown Augusta, the Pinizy Center is both a nature park and research center that works toward a world in which clean water is accessible to everyone. After visiting the center, passengers board the bus to the Augusta Canal Discovery Center, which features hands-on exhibits on hydropower. In addition, the trip also includes recreational activities like kayaking and disc golf.

"Tours change lives," says Crooms, who hopes to inspire the kind of a-ha moments in others that she experienced as a teen and again at the Green Festival. "When I went to Montreal, Quebec, and Niagara Falls, it changed my life."

—Rina Torchinsky