

The NATURE BUS



Wandering Wednesdays

Weekly, Full Day Field Trip

At The Nature Bus School, Wandering Wednesdays are a cherished and intentional part of our weekly rhythm, offering immersive and behind-the-scenes experiences that connect children to their local community. Rather than a once-a-year field trip, our students set out on thoughtfully planned weekly adventures that allow learning to unfold in real-world settings.

Once each week, children spend the full day exploring beyond our regular outdoor learning locations. These days give children the opportunity to spend extended time immersed in one meaningful place—whether a working farm, local business, cultural site, or natural area.

Children may meet the people and experts behind these places, see how things work, and apply academic skills in authentic, real-world contexts.

Through these experiences, children deepen their understanding of the world around them while developing a strong sense of place, responsibility, and environmental stewardship.

Wandering Wednesdays extend and enrich the learning that happens throughout the rest of the week, often becoming the highlight of the school experience—the stories children retell and the moments that linger long after the day is done.

Where Do We Travel?

Wandering Wednesday destinations are selected within approximately a one-hour radius of our pickup location and vary throughout the year based on:

- Seasonal themes
- Learning goals
- Weather conditions
- Children's interests and readiness

All locations are carefully planned and aligned with our educational and safety standards.

Example Wandering Wednesday Destinations

Nature Play & Environmental Learning

Places where children can explore freely, investigate natural materials, and engage their senses.

- **Wildrock** — creative nature play, loose parts, and thoughtful risk-taking
- **Sky Meadows State Park** — meadows, trails, and seasonal change
- **Mint Springs Valley Park** — lake ecology, forest play, and group exploration
- **Blue Ridge Tunnel** — sensory exploration (light/dark, echoes, temperature), geology, and engineering wonder
- **Rockfish Valley Trail** — easy walking paths, bridges, water observation, and accessible nature study
- **Heyward Community Forest** — quiet community forest supporting habitat observation, stewardship learning, and repeat-visit exploration
- **Patricia Ann Byrom Forest Preserve Park** — expansive forest preserve offering wildlife observation, forest ecosystem study, and deep nature immersion

Gardens & Living Collections

Locations that invite close observation of plants, cycles, and seasonal change.

- **State Arboretum of Virginia (Blandy Experimental Farm)** — plant science, tree collections, and environmental research
- **Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden** — living collections, pollinators, and plant diversity
- **Gardens at Waterperry Farm** — ornamental and productive gardens supporting sensory learning, seasonal change, and place-based botany
- **Boxerwood Nature Center & Woodland Garden** — child-centered woodland gardens designed for exploration, inquiry, native plants, and environmental stewardship
- **Seasonal pollinator and native plant gardens** — repeated visits for phenology, journaling, and stewardship
- **And more...**

Mountains, Trails & Natural Landmarks

Extended hikes and scenic areas that build stamina, confidence, and spatial awareness.

- **Shenandoah National Park** — geography, observation, and endurance
 - Swift Run Gap entrance approximately 20 minutes from pickup location
 - A wide variety of young-child-friendly hikes
 - National Park Service ranger-led programs for children and young learners
- **Ragged Mountain Natural Area** — watershed study and forest ecosystems
- **Natural Bridge State Park** — geology, scale, and natural wonder
- **Luray Caverns** — underground geology, formations, sound, and scale
- **And more...**

Farms & Agricultural Learning

Pre-arranged visits where children learn directly from farmers about land, food, and care.

- **Working farms and orchards** — food systems and seasonal cycles
- **Beekeeping and pollinator sites** — insects, ecosystems, and stewardship
- **Regenerative farms** — animals, soil, and sustainability
- **Local family farms (by arrangement)** — hands-on exposure to animals, planting cycles, food systems, and land stewardship
- **Pick-your-own orchards and educational farm spaces** — exploration of pollination, fruit trees, harvest cycles, and local food systems
- **And more...**

History, Culture & Place-Based Learning

Experiential sites where history is learned through movement, conversation, and observation.

- **Monticello** — place-based history and storytelling
- **Montpelier** — history, landscape, and civic ideas
- **Frontier Culture Museum** — early American life and daily rhythms
- **And more...**

Science & Discovery / Interactive Learning

Hands-on environments that support inquiry, experimentation, and problem-solving.

- **Virginia Discovery Museum** — engineering, science, and design thinking
- **Explore More Discovery Museum** — interactive exhibits and playful problem-solving
- **Children's Museum of Richmond** — play-based exploration supporting early science, engineering, and curiosity

- **Science Museum of Virginia** — large-scale interactive exhibits in physics, engineering, life science, and early scientific inquiry
- **Leander McCormick Observatory (University of Virginia)** — through specially arranged, age-appropriate visits, children explore astronomy by learning about stars, planets, light, and scale. Experiences introduce how scientists observe the universe and spark curiosity about the world beyond Earth.
- **John C. Wells Planetarium** — guided exploration of stars, planets, and celestial movement that inspires curiosity and wonder
- **My Three Chambered Heart Reptile Natural History Museum** — live reptiles, interactive exhibits, and hands-on learning supporting biology and animal science
- **And more...**

Community Services & Community Helpers

Opportunities for children to learn from the people who care for, protect, and support our community.

These destinations allow children to step inside the everyday work of their community and learn directly from the people who serve it. Through age-appropriate, behind-the-scenes experiences, children begin to understand how different roles work together to keep a community healthy, safe, and connected.

Children may meet professionals, observe tools and environments, ask questions, and gain early exposure to a wide range of meaningful careers—helping them see themselves as capable, curious participants in the world around them.

Example community service and helper visits may include:

- **Local universities and colleges** — meeting educators, researchers, groundskeepers, librarians, and other campus professionals to explore the many roles that support learning and discovery

- **Fire stations** — fire safety, equipment exploration, and learning about teamwork and community protection
- **Police stations** — community safety, helping roles, and understanding public service
- **Hospitals and medical facilities** — learning about helpers in healthcare and the tools they use to care for others (age-appropriate and pre-arranged)
- **Post offices** — mail systems, logistics, and how communication travels through a community
- **Park ranger offices** — land stewardship, wildlife protection, and caring for shared natural spaces
- **Senior and assisted living communities** — intergenerational connection, kindness, storytelling, and shared experience.
- **And more...**

These visits emphasize respect, curiosity, and relationship-building. They help children see that learning doesn't just happen in nature or museums—it also happens through people, services, and real-world responsibility.

Safety & Preparation

Every Wandering Wednesday includes:

- Pre-planned destinations and routes
- Clear supervision ratios and defined boundaries
- Transportation via The Nature Bus, operated by our lead teacher and CDL-certified driver
- Emergency supplies and communication systems
- Child preparation through discussion, routines, and expectations

Children are supported in navigating new environments with confidence, care, and curiosity.