



TEXAS ISLAND ADVENTURE

Bio-Treks: STEM Ecology Series

A global series of immersive STEM programs exploring biology, ecology, geology, ocean science, and environmental sustainability through hands-on fieldwork and meaningful environmental context.

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Bio-Treks: STEM Ecology Series

South Padre Island, Texas

Day	Meals	Morning	Afternoon		Evening		
1	D	Travel to Brownsville / South Padre Island; transfer to Hotel		Welcome, Safety & Orientation		Welcome Dinner	
2	B, D	University of Texas Coastal Science Laboratory: 2-hour Cruise on the Ridley Floating Classroom, Guided Beach Ecology Walk, Dogfish Shark Dissection & Lunch				Dinner	Evening Crab Ecology Walk
3	B, D	Beach Time / Free Time	Sand Dune Ecology & Restoration Program	SPI Birding & Nature Center + Alligator Sanctuary		Dinner	Go Carts & Mini-Golf
4	B, D	Sea Turtle Presentation & Rescue Facility Tour	SERVICE PROJECT: Beach Care & Clean-Up Initiative	Sandcastle Team Building Beach Workshop		Dinner & Free Time	
5	B, D	Port Isabel Lighthouse & Maritime History Program	Dolphin Research & Sea Life Center + Marine Biology Workshop	Microplastics Field Lab Sustainability in Action		Farewell Beach Dinner & Sunset Reflection Circle	
6	B	Free time until departure	Transfer to airport, depart South Padre Island for home				



As with all sample itineraries, please be advised that this is an 'example' of a schedule and that the activities and hotels shown may be variable dependent upon dates, weather, special requests and other factors. Itineraries will be confirmed prior to travel.



Hammock Expeditions, LLC
1200 SE 14th Street, Suite 8-150
Bentonville, Arkansas 72712
P: 984.223.9866
www.HammockExpeditions.com
www.STEMStudyTours.com



A Message From Our Team

At STEM Study Tours, we believe students learn best when they're immersed, engaged, and inspired. Every program is built with intention - blending hands-on discovery, academic depth, and meaningful experiences that help students see the world (and themselves) in new ways. Our goal is for each itinerary to spark curiosity, build confidence, and create moments students carry long after the trip ends. We're honored to partner with schools who share that vision and to help bring learning to life beyond the classroom.

— Michele & The Hammock Expeditions Team

Why Travel With Hammock Expeditions & STEM Study Tours

Schools choose us because we design programs that are organized, intentional, and built around real learning. Our itineraries combine strong academics with smooth logistics, giving teachers confidence and giving students opportunities to explore, ask questions, and grow. We partner with trusted local experts, communicate clearly, and support groups every step of the way so educators can focus on their students - not the logistics.

What Sets Us Apart

- **Purpose-Driven Itineraries** - Students actively participate in meaningful, real-world learning.
- **Safety, Structure & Professionalism** - From 24-hour support to vetted partners and clear communication, we ensure teachers can focus on their students while we handle the logistics.
- **Hands-On, High-Impact Learning** - Our programs emphasize field science, conservation, and experiential learning - the kind that sticks with students long after the trip ends.
- **Student-Centered Design** - We balance learning with fun, reflection with adventure, and structure with flexibility. Every day is crafted to keep students engaged, energized, and supported.
- **A Team That Travels With Purpose** - We're educators, planners, naturalists, and travel professionals who care deeply about student growth. Your goals become our goals.

Our Commitment to You

When you travel with us, you gain a partner who understands your vision, anticipates your needs, and delivers an experience your students will remember for years to come. We're here to support your school, empower your students, and make every moment meaningful.

We want to be your educational partner. Let us know how we may serve you.

Michele, Christina, Izzy, Dana, Taylor, and the Team



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Discover south Texas' stunning shoreline on South Padre Island. Watch the gulls and pelicans fish the waters while teaching your students about coastal habitats and having some serious fun teambuilding on the beach.

Texas Island STEM Adventure immerses students in coastal science, conservation, and sustainability through hands-on field experiences at South Padre Island. From marine research aboard the R/V Ridley to dune restoration and wildlife ecology, each day blends discovery, teamwork, and environmental stewardship.

Day 1 – Welcome to Texas!

Welcome Dinner

After arriving in Brownsville and crossing the Queen Isabella Causeway onto South Padre Island, students settle into their hotel and begin their coastal adventure. We'll gather for a Welcome, Safety & Orientation Meeting to set expectations, build excitement, and introduce the themes of science, stewardship, and teamwork that will shape the week. The evening concludes with a relaxed Welcome Dinner - your group's first chance to connect, unwind, and soak in the island atmosphere.

South Padre Island... Where science meets the sea and the coastline tells its own story. This barrier island—shaped by wind, water, and time, and framed by the calm Laguna Madre and the open Gulf of Mexico—invites students to explore one of the most vibrant ecosystems on the Texas coast. Here, marine research, coastal ecology, wildlife science, and sustainability come alive in real time.

Cross the Queen Isabella Causeway and everything shifts: the air softens, the horizon widens, and curiosity comes naturally. With 34 miles of sun-washed beaches and clear emerald water, South Padre Island becomes a living laboratory—one where dunes move, wetlands breathe, and every tide reveals something new.

From sea turtle conservation and dune restoration to research vessels, lighthouse climbs, and microplastics field labs, this island offers endless opportunities for discovery. Calm seas, warm sunshine, and a spirit of adventure make it an ideal year-round destination where students don't just learn science—they experience it.



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Padre Island Fun Facts

- ✚ **Sea Turtle Rescue & Ecotourism** - South Padre Island is a leader in coastal conservation. At Sea Turtle Inc., visitors learn about endangered sea turtles and the efforts to rescue, rehabilitate, and release them back into the Gulf.
- ✚ **A True Tropical Latitude** - Sitting at latitude 26.1° N—nearly identical to Nassau, Bahamas—South Padre enjoys warm temperatures year-round, making it a natural outdoor classroom.
- ✚ **Longest Barrier Island in the World** - South Padre Island is part of Padre Island, a 113-mile barrier island—the longest on Earth. Fewer than 3,000 residents call the city home, giving it a relaxed, small-town feel.
- ✚ **A Hypersaline Bay** - The Laguna Madre is one of only six hypersaline bays in the world—saltier than the ocean and rich with unique marine life.
- ✚ **Shipwrecks & Spanish Treasure** - In the 1500s, Spanish fleets sailed this coastline. The 1554 “Wreck of the 300” scattered silver across the seafloor, inspiring treasure hunters for centuries.
- ✚ **The Karankawa People** - The island’s earliest inhabitants were known for their remarkable height and strength, and for their deep connection to the coastal landscape.
- ✚ **Glamour on the Gulf** - In the 1920s, the Port Isabel Yacht Club welcomed icons like Amelia Earhart, Al Capone, and Charles Lindbergh—adding a touch of golden-age glamour to the region’s history.

Day 2 – Coastal Sciences

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today’s activities include:

University of Texas Coastal Sciences Laboratory – Located on South Padre Island, the UT Coastal Studies Lab has been a hub for marine research, education, and coastal stewardship since 1973. Their mission centers on hands-on learning, scientific discovery, and community outreach focused on the Gulf of Mexico and the unique ecosystems of South Texas.

Today, your group will spend a full day immersed in coastal science. Depending on group size, students may rotate through activities in smaller teams. Each group will complete **three learning modules** with a break for lunch.



2-hour Cruise on the Ridley Floating Classroom - Students step aboard the 57-foot **R/V Ridley** for a guided research cruise through the Laguna Madre and surrounding ship channels. This floating classroom is fully equipped for field science, giving students the chance to investigate the marine environment using real research tools.

Highlights include:

- Collecting specimens with **plankton nets, trawls, sediment samplers, and water-quality probes**
- Observing marine organisms in the **onboard touch tank**
- Using **digital microscopes** to study plankton and invertebrates



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- Learning from educator-naturalists about the **Laguna Madre ecosystem**, wildlife adaptations, and human impacts
- Spotting bottlenose dolphins, sea turtles, brown pelicans, and other coastal wildlife

The goal of the Ridley experience is to deepen students' understanding of this rare hypersaline bay and inspire long-term stewardship of Texas' coastal resources.

Guided Beach Ecology Hike - Led by a Coastal Studies Lab naturalist, students explore the shoreline and jetties while learning how dunes, pollinators, wildlife, and marine habitats interact to shape the island's ecosystem. After the hike, students tour the lab, investigate invertebrates in the touch tank, and complete a scavenger hunt or dichotomous key activity that reinforces species identification and ecological relationships.



Dogfish Shark Dissection - In this hands-on lab, students examine the anatomy and physiology of the dogfish shark, gaining insight into adaptations, organ systems, and the role of predators in marine food webs. Larger groups may also rotate through supplemental activities such as a **marine debris investigation** or a **watershed model demonstration**.

In the evening, we'll have dinner locally and then save time for an **evening beach stroll to look for crabs**. Make sure to bring your flashlight!

Day 3 – Island Ecology Day

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today's activities include:

Morning Free Time! - Enjoy an easy morning on the beach for fun in the sun, plan some shopping time, or let us help you create something amazing!

Sand Dune Ecology & Restoration Program - Students step into the island's most important natural defense system during this hands-on dune ecology and restoration program led by trained naturalists. Through guided exploration, they learn how dunes form, why native vegetation matters, and how wind and waves shape the barrier island over time. Students participate in restoration activities such as planting native grasses or assisting with erosion-control efforts, gaining a firsthand understanding of how healthy dunes protect wildlife, beaches, and coastal communities. This workshop blends field science with real-world stewardship, empowering students to make a meaningful impact on the island's future.



SPI Birding & Nature Center + Alligator Sanctuary - Students explore one of South Padre Island's most vibrant wildlife habitats during a guided visit to the SPI Birding & Nature Center and Alligator Sanctuary. Elevated boardwalks lead through coastal wetlands where herons, egrets, spoonbills, and migratory shorebirds feed and nest, offering students an up-close look at the island's rich biodiversity. Naturalists share insights into wetland ecology, bird behavior, and the importance of these habitats within the larger Laguna Madre ecosystem. The



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experience continues at the Alligator Sanctuary, where students learn about alligator biology, conservation, and the role of apex predators in maintaining healthy ecosystems. With a mix of observation, interpretation, and wildlife encounters, this program brings the island's wetlands to life in a way that is both educational and unforgettable.

Gravity Park: Go-Karts & Mini-Golf - Students wrap up the day with classic island fun at Gravity Park, South Padre's long-running beachfront amusement center. Your group package includes go-karts and mini-golf - perfect for friendly competition and team bonding. Those who want even more adventure can add optional attractions such as the Skycoaster, the Rocket reverse-bungee, trampoline rides, or the climbing wall. It's a lighthearted, high-energy evening that balances the day's science and exploration with pure fun.

Day 4 – Sea Turtles & Conservation

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today's activities include:

Sea Turtle, Inc. - Students have the opportunity to visit a world-renowned organization dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of injured sea turtles. Founded in 1977 to protect the endangered Kemp's Ridley, the center now leads global efforts in conservation, research, and public education. During their visit, students participate in a Turtle Talk and an interactive educational program that explores sea turtle biology, threats to their survival, and the critical role these animals play in healthy marine ecosystems. Through close observation and expert-led interpretation, students gain a deeper understanding of conservation science and the real-world impact of protecting endangered species.



SERVICE PROJECT: Beach Care & Clean-Up Initiative – Students spend the afternoon enjoying South Padre Island's shoreline while taking part in a meaningful conservation effort. Equipped with supplies provided by the City of South Padre Island, students participate in a guided beach clean-up focused on protecting coastal habitats and reducing marine debris. As they collect and sort litter, students learn how pollution impacts wildlife, dune systems, and the health of the Gulf ecosystem. This hands-on stewardship activity reinforces the importance of individual action and empowers students to contribute directly to the preservation of the island's natural environment.

Sandcastle Team Building Beach Workshop - Students tap into creativity, collaboration, and coastal engineering during this hands-on sandcastle workshop led by a professional sand sculptor. With shovels, buckets, carving tools, and expert guidance, teams learn the techniques behind building strong, sculpted sand structures — from water management and compaction to design strategy and detail work. Whether crafting a towering castle, a themed sculpture, or a custom message or logo, students work together toward a shared goal in a fun, relaxed beach setting. Larger groups can break into smaller teams, and those with a design in mind are encouraged to bring their ideas to life.



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Day 5 – Marine Science & Coastal Stewardship

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today's activities include:

Port Isabel Lighthouse & Maritime History Program - Students begin the day across the causeway in historic Port Isabel, home to the only lighthouse on the Texas coast open to the public. Climbing the spiral staircase to the top, they take in panoramic views of the Laguna Madre and Gulf of Mexico while learning how lighthouse keepers once guided ships through these shallow, shifting waters. The experience continues with a guided program at the Port Isabel Historical Museum or Treasures of the Gulf Museum, where students explore shipwrecks, Spanish treasure fleets, early navigation tools, and the maritime history that shaped South Texas. This program blends coastal geography, engineering, and history, giving students a deeper understanding of how people and the environment have interacted along the Gulf for centuries.

Dolphin Research & Sea Life Center + Marine Biology Master Class

Students dive into the world of marine science with a guided program at the Dolphin Research & Sea Life Center, a nonprofit dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and study of marine animals in the Laguna Madre. Through interactive exhibits and close-up encounters, students learn about dolphin behavior, communication, and the challenges facing marine mammals in coastal environments. The experience deepens with a hands-on workshop where educators introduce students to local species, food webs, and the ecological dynamics of the bay. Students may observe rescued animals, examine biological specimens, or participate in data-collection activities that mirror real research practices. This program blends animal science, conservation, and field biology, giving students a meaningful look at how scientists protect and study marine life along the Texas coast.



Microplastics Field Lab: Sustainability in Action - Students take a deep dive into one of today's most urgent environmental challenges during this hands-on microplastics field lab. Guided by trained educators, students collect sand samples directly from the beach and use sieves, sorting trays, and hand lenses to identify and classify microplastics hidden within the shoreline. As they analyze their findings, students explore how plastics break down, how these particles move through marine ecosystems, and why they pose a threat to wildlife — including the sea turtles and dolphins they've encountered earlier in the program. This workshop blends field science, data collection, and environmental stewardship, empowering students to connect their discoveries to real-world sustainability issues. By the end, they not only understand the science behind microplastics but also the role they can play in protecting coastal environments.

Day 6 – Goodbye!

Breakfast included; lunch & dinner on own

After breakfast at our hotel, we'll check-out, load our bags into the coach and set off for the regional airport. If you're lucky enough to get a later flight, enjoy your last morning on the beach, shopping in town, or just getting a little downtime for rest and relaxation.

A Final Note

As your Texas Island STEM Adventure comes to a close, we hope your students leave South Padre Island with new knowledge, new friendships, and a deeper appreciation for the coastal environments that shape our world. From marine research vessels and wildlife encounters to conservation projects and reflection circles at sunset, this program is designed to inspire curiosity, stewardship, and a lifelong love of learning. We're honored to share this journey with you - and we look forward to welcoming you on your next adventure.



OPTIONAL ADD-ON: Beach Waterpark Day

From **May through September**, schools have the option to add an extra day of pure fun at the [Beach Waterpark](#) in South Padre Island. Open only during the summer season, the waterpark offers slides, lazy rivers, wave pools, and shaded relaxation areas - making it a perfect warm-weather addition for groups looking to balance science with a little splash-filled adventure. This optional add-on can be built into the itinerary for summer-traveling schools who want to extend their trip with a full day of play.



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Weather in South Padre Island, Texas

Spring (March–May): Warm, Breezy, and Comfortable

- › Temperature: 75–85°F (24–29°C) by late spring
- › Conditions: Mild humidity, steady Gulf breezes, and mostly sunny days. Rainfall is low, and water temperatures warm from the upper 60s into the mid-70s.
- › Highlights: Ideal beach weather, kite-flying winds, and excellent conditions for coastal ecology labs and fieldwork.
- › Packing Tips: Light layers, sun protection, breathable clothing, and comfortable walking sandals or sneakers.

Summer (June–August): Hot, Humid, and Sun-Soaked

- › Temperature: 88–90°F (31–32°C) with warm Gulf water around 82–84°F.
- › Conditions: Hot afternoons, high humidity, and abundant sunshine. Gulf breezes help, and brief afternoon thunderstorms can pop up and clear quickly.
- › Highlights: Peak season for swimming, kayaking, marine biology activities, and barrier-island field studies.
- › Packing Tips: Breathable clothing, reef-safe sunscreen, hat, refillable water bottle, and quick-dry layers for water activities.

Fall (September–November): Warm, Calm, and Tropical

- › Temperature: 78–89°F (26–32°C).
- › Conditions: Warm days, pleasant evenings, and Gulf water that stays in the low-80s through early fall. September is the rainiest month, with higher chances of tropical systems.
- › Highlights: Excellent conditions for coastal wildlife observation, dune ecology, and sunset field sessions.
- › Packing Tips: Light layers, sun protection, and a lightweight rain jacket for occasional showers.

Winter (December–February): Mild, Dry, and Breezy

- › Temperature: 68–72°F (20–22°C) during the day, dipping into the mid-50s at night.
- › Conditions: Mostly sunny, low humidity, and comfortable “sweater-weather” days. Occasional short cold fronts can briefly drop temperatures, but conditions rebound quickly.
- › Highlights: Quiet beaches, excellent birding, and ideal weather for long walks, shelling, and outdoor STEM sessions.
- › Packing Tips: Light layers, a sweater or windbreaker, comfortable closed-toe shoes, and sun protection — even in winter.

Courtesy & Expectations in Texas

Respect for Coastal Environments - South Padre Island’s dunes, seagrass beds, and wildlife habitats are fragile. Stay on marked paths, follow guide instructions, and avoid disturbing nesting areas or marine life. Touch animals only during supervised educational activities.

Environmental Stewardship - Dispose of trash properly, use reef-safe sunscreen, and leave beaches and boardwalks exactly as you found them. Small actions help protect the island’s ecosystems and water quality.

Island Courtesy - South Padre is friendly and relaxed. Be mindful of traffic near beach access points, keep backpacks zipped, and use respectful voices in shops and cafés. Locals appreciate calm, considerate behavior.

Photography & Wildlife Sensitivity - Photography is welcome outdoors but always give wildlife plenty of space - especially birds and sea turtles. Ask before photographing people and follow any posted restrictions in research or rescue facilities.



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Local Businesses & Community Spaces - Many stops on the island are small, locally owned organizations. Handle items carefully, follow staff guidance, and show appreciation for educators and volunteers who support conservation work.

Safety & Group Awareness - Coastal weather can shift quickly. Stay with your group, listen to your Tour Director, and bring sun protection and water for outdoor activities. Awareness and preparation help ensure safe exploration.

Taste of South Texas – Local Favorites to Try

South Texas blends fresh Gulf seafood with Tex-Mex comfort foods and classic island favorites. Whether grabbing a quick bite near the beach or exploring local cafés during free time, students will find plenty of delicious, easy-to-love options on South Padre Island.

1. **Gulf Shrimp & Fish Tacos** – Light, fresh, and often served with lime, cabbage slaw, and house-made sauces. A student favorite and widely available across the island.
2. **Quesadillas & Street Tacos** – Quick, affordable, and customizable with chicken, beef, or veggies. Tex-Mex staples that are perfect for lunch between activities.
3. **South Texas BBQ** – Tender brisket, pulled pork, and smoked sausage served with classic sides. Great for hearty group dinners.
4. **Fresh Fruit Cups & Aguas Frescas** – Cool, refreshing options featuring watermelon, mango, pineapple, and lightly sweetened drinks — perfect on warm days.
5. **Island Burgers & Sandwiches** – Easy, familiar meals with plenty of student-friendly choices, from grilled chicken to veggie options.
6. **Seafood Platters** – Mild, fresh Gulf fish like red snapper or flounder prepared simply and deliciously — great for students trying local cuisine.
7. **Ice Cream & Shaved Ice** – Popular treats across the island, especially after beach or field activities.



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Entry Requirements for Travel to the USA

Entry requirements for entering the United States vary by nationality, and all travelers are responsible for checking the most current information during planning and before departure. The guidelines below are accurate at the time of writing and are subject to change without notice. Always verify requirements through your government's travel authority and the official U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) or U.S. Department of State websites prior to travel.

General Requirements *(All International Travelers)*

- ✓ A valid passport
- ✓ Proof of onward or return travel
- ✓ Compliance with U.S. Customs and Border Protection screening
- ✓ No active travel restrictions or inadmissibility flags

Visa or ESTA Requirements - Visa Waiver Program Travelers *(Including many European and Asian countries)*

- ✓ Must obtain ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization) prior to travel
- ✓ Passport must be an approved e-passport
- ✓ ESTA is valid for short stays (up to 90 days)

Visa or ESTA Requirements - Non-Visa Waiver Travelers

- ✓ Must obtain a B-1/B-2 visitor visa
- ✓ May be asked to show proof of accommodation, program details, or financial means

U.S. Citizens & Permanent Residents

- ✓ No passport or visa required for domestic travel
- ✓ Government-issued photo ID required for flights (REAL ID compliant)

Important Notes

- Entry requirements can change; travelers must check for updates before departure.
- Some nationalities may require additional documentation or interviews.
- Schools traveling as a group should ensure all passports meet validity requirements.



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BIO-TREK SERIES: TEXAS ISLAND STEM ADVENTURE

Minimum Booking Numbers: 20 students

What's Included:

- ✓ Roundtrip flights OR motorcoach transportation
- ✓ 5-nights' accommodation in South Padre Island
- ✓ SPI airport transfers and local transfers via coach and trolley
- ✓ Breakfasts & dinners daily starting with dinner on your night of arrival and ending with breakfast on departure (dependent upon flight times)
- ✓ University of Texas Coastal Science Laboratory with:
 - 2-hour cruise on the Ridley Floating Classroom Marine Research Vessel
 - Guided Beach Ecology Walk
 - Dogfish Shark Dissection Lab
- ✓ Evening Crab Ecology Walk (bring your flashlight!)
- ✓ Sand Dune Ecology & Restoration Program
- ✓ SPI Birding & Nature Center with Alligator Sanctuary
- ✓ Go Carts & Mini-Golf at Gravity Park
- ✓ Sea Turtle Presentation & Rescue Facility Tour
- ✓ SERVICE PROJECT: Beach Care & Clean-Up Initiative
- ✓ Sandcastle Team Building Project
- ✓ Port Isabel Lighthouse & Maritime History Program
- ✓ Dolphin Research & Sea Life Center + Marine Biology Master Class
- ✓ Microplastics Field Lab: Sustainability in Action
- ✓ Sunset Reflection Circle
- ✓ Personal Tour Director
- ✓ 24-hour emergency cover

What's Not Included:

- ⊗ Fully comprehensive insurance (**mandatory**)
- ⊗ Baggage costs, pay directly to airline if required
- ⊗ Baggage handling - everyone should be able to pull / load their own bag
- ⊗ Transfers to/from home airport
- ⊗ Lunches, snacks or beverages other than at designated mealtimes
- ⊗ Meal selections other than ones provided for the entire group (we are generally able to cater for allergy conditions, vegetarians, halal and in some cases vegan)
- ⊗ Cost of personal passports, visas or visa waiver fees
- ⊗ Cost of inoculations or medication required for travel
- ⊗ Sightseeing / Entertainment / Transport not shown in Itinerary
- ⊗ Hotel incidental deposits & bills – mini-bar, movies, etc.
- ⊗ Gratuities – drivers, hotel services, local guides, tour director
- ⊗ Credit card fees if individuals wish to pay via credit card instead of ACH
- ⊗ Additional taxes, fuel surcharges or fees levied by governments / suppliers

As always, our staff are always available to you to answer any questions you may have regarding programming. If we may serve you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.