



Tour: **TIDES OF DISCOVERY**
Middle School Edition
Destination: Topsail Island, Sneads Ferry & Wilmington, North Carolina
Itinerary: 5-days / 4-nights
Focus: Coastal Sciences, History & Culture

TIDES OF DISCOVERY - MIDDLE SCHOOL EDITION

Topsail Island, Sneads Ferry & Wilmington, North Carolina

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	
1	Travel to Topsail Island area, North Carolina; transfer to hotel		Welcome, Safety & Orientation Meeting	Welcome Dinner
2	Mountains-to-Sea Trail Ecology Trek, Master Class & Volunteer Project	Shellfish Sustainability Master Class, Shark Tooth Hunt, Tidepooling & Shallow Water Treasure Search		Local Dinner Camp Bonfire, Pirate & Shipwreck Tales
3	Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue & Rehabilitation Center / Master Class	Hammocks Beach State Park Ranger Programming		Beach Martial Arts Class Local Dinner
4	Battleship North Carolina Museum with Private Tour	Fort Fisher State Historic Site & Civil War Museum	NC Aquarium & Marine Master Class	Farewell Dinner Reflection Circle
5	Free time until Departure		Depart North Carolina 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.

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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Get ready for a fun 5-day journey to the beaches of North Carolina! The coastal areas are brimming with life and adventure and during this trip, students will explore coastal activities and learn about the history and marine habitats that enchant this stunning region.

This trip is available year-round but please know that many of the planned activities are outdoor and therefore, weather dependent.

Day 1 – Welcome to North Carolina!

Welcome Dinner

North Carolina... Coastal North Carolina is a region shaped by barrier islands, maritime forests, and centuries of seafaring history. Stretching from the vibrant port city of Wilmington to the quiet southern reaches of the Outer Banks, this coastline blends wild Atlantic beaches with calm sounds, tidal marshes, and small towns that feel deeply connected to the water. Students experience a living laboratory of coastal ecology here — from nesting sea turtles and migrating shorebirds to salt marsh estuaries teeming with life. The area’s natural beauty is matched by its cultural richness: historic lighthouses, working waterfronts, and communities that have long relied on fishing, boatbuilding, and maritime trade.

This stretch of coast is also home to some of North Carolina’s most compelling stories. Wilmington’s riverfront and historic district reveal layers of colonial, Civil War, and World War II history, while nearby islands like Topsail and Surf City carry legends of pirates, shipwrecks, and early American innovation. As you travel north toward the southern Outer Banks, the landscape shifts into a chain of narrow islands shaped by wind and tide — places where wild dunes, wide beaches, and quiet coastal towns create an unforgettable sense of place. Together, these coastal communities offer students a powerful blend of science, history, and hands-on discovery along one of the most distinctive shorelines on the East Coast.

Top 10 North Carolina Fun Facts

- › The Wright Brothers made history in North Carolina. In 1903, they achieved the world’s first powered flight at Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk — a moment that changed transportation forever.
- › The “Lost Colony” remains one of America’s greatest mysteries. England’s first settlement, founded by Sir Walter Raleigh on Roanoke Island, vanished without a trace except for the word *Croatoan* carved into a tree.
- › Blackbeard once roamed the North Carolina coast. Beaufort — once nicknamed “Fish Town” — was a favorite haunt of the infamous pirate in the early 1700s.
- › The Venus flytrap grows naturally only in coastal North Carolina. Hampstead and surrounding areas are the plant’s tiny native habitat.
- › Pepsi was born in New Bern. Pharmacist Caleb Bradham created the drink in 1898 and first served it at his drugstore soda fountain.
- › The Battleship *North Carolina* is a floating piece of WWII history. Saved from scrapping by public donations — including schoolchildren’s dimes — she now rests proudly in Wilmington.
- › Grandfather Mountain is globally recognized for its biodiversity. It’s the only privately owned park designated by the United Nations as an International Biosphere Reserve.



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- › North Carolina is the nation’s #1 sweet potato producer. Students from Wilson County even convinced lawmakers to make it the official state vegetable.
- › North Carolina’s Outer Banks are home to some of the tallest sand dunes on the East Coast. Jockey’s Ridge is a favorite spot for hang gliding and sunset views.
- › The Biltmore Estate in Asheville is America’s largest privately owned home. Built by George Vanderbilt in the late 1800s, it spans 175,000 square feet.

Students arrive in coastal North Carolina and travel to the Topsail Island area, settling into their hotel and meeting their Tour Director. Once everyone is checked in and refreshed, the group gathers for a Welcome, Safety & Orientation Meeting to review trip expectations, daily routines, and how our team ensures students feel supported and supervised throughout the week. It’s a chance to meet the staff, go over safety protocols, and set the tone for a fun, respectful, and curiosity-driven adventure along North Carolina’s coast. The evening concludes with a Welcome Dinner, giving students time to relax, connect, and get excited for the days ahead exploring Topsail Island, Sneads Ferry, and Wilmington.

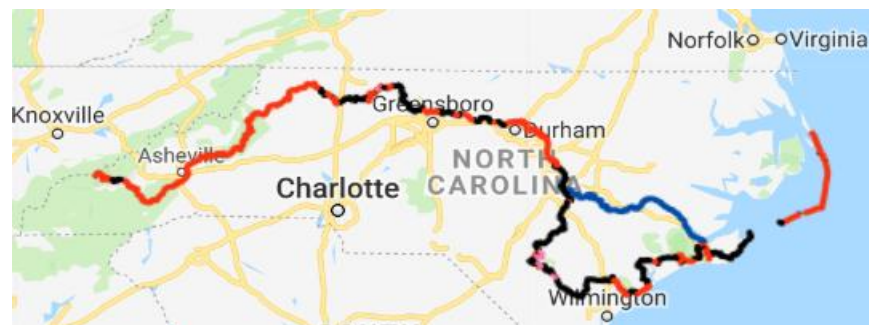
Day 2 – Inland Forests & Topsail Island

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today’s activities include:

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail Ecology Trek, Master Class & Volunteer Project - Get ready to explore one of North Carolina’s most remarkable natural corridors — the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, stretching from the Great Smoky Mountains all the way to the Outer Banks. This long-distance trail showcases the state’s incredible ecological diversity, winding through ancient mountains, small farms, coastal wetlands, and barrier islands.

Students will hike a scenic section of the trail alongside a local Naturalist, learning to identify native plants and wildlife while discovering how ecosystems shift from upland forests to coastal habitats. After the trek, the group joins trail stewards for a hands-on volunteer project, helping preserve and protect this vital landscape for future explorers. It’s an active, meaningful day that connects environmental science, teamwork, and stewardship — all while experiencing the beauty of North Carolina’s wild side.



Shellfish Sustainability Master Class – Coastal North Carolina is rich in natural resources, and its shellfish industry plays a vital role in both the local economy and the health of the ecosystem. Students will dive into the world of sustainable aquaculture, learning how oysters, clams, and shrimp are responsibly cultivated in the sounds and estuaries that line the coast. They’ll discover how wild oysters grow by attaching to older shells, and how modern farmers use water-column leases and specialized gear — baskets, bags, and cages — to raise single oysters with precision and care.



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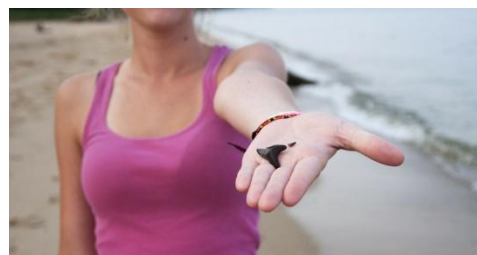


This afternoon, the group meets with a local aquaculture farmer for an inside look at the science and innovation behind shellfish production. Students explore the full growth cycle, from spat to harvest, and examine how sustainability practices protect water quality, support marine habitats, and ensure a reliable food source for future generations. It's a hands-on, eye-opening master class that connects marine biology, environmental stewardship, and real-world food systems.



Topsail Island - Topsail Island is one of North Carolina's most unspoiled coastal treasures — a quiet barrier-island escape just 30 minutes north of Wilmington. Bordered by the calm Intracoastal Waterway on one side and the wild Atlantic on the other, the island is a natural playground for beachcombing, tidepooling, birdwatching, kayaking, surfing, and exploring miles of pristine shoreline. This coastline is also vital habitat for loggerhead sea turtles and brown pelicans, and during nesting season visitors may witness conservation teams protecting nests or, with luck, see hatchlings making their first journey to the ocean. Marshes and inlets surrounding the island are alive with egrets, herons, and coastal wildlife, offering students a living classroom in coastal ecology.

Topsail's peaceful beaches hide a dramatic past shaped by pirates, shipwrecks, and early American innovation. Local legend says the island earned its name when merchant ships learned to watch for the "top sails" of pirate vessels hiding behind the dunes. In the 1940s, Topsail became a hub of military research during Operation Bumblebee, a Navy missile-development program that paved the way for modern rocketry and the future NASA program. The concrete observation towers still scattered across the island stand as reminders of this extraordinary chapter in American science and engineering.



Beach Walk with Shell & Shark Tooth Hunt on Topsail Island – Join a local guide for a relaxed beach walk along Topsail Island as you search for coastal treasures — from colorful seashells to ancient shark teeth. Students experience the thrill of the hunt as they scan the shoreline for unique finds, hoping to spot that perfect, unbroken shell or a rare fossil to take home as a keepsake. Along the way, your guide shares tips on identifying different shells and explains how tides, storms, and shifting sands reveal new discoveries each day.

It's a fun, hands-on coastal adventure that blends exploration with a little friendly competition. Keep your eyes sharp — **prizes will be awarded for the best finds.**



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Know your shells! Knowledge is power so go ahead and brush up on your North Carolina seashell identification skills. Visit [NC Shell Club](#) to brush up on shell identification. It provides professional photographs, scientific names, and all the information you need to learn more about the most common North Carolina shells and how to identify them. Here are some of the most popular NC shells that you might come across in your seashell hunt.

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Auger Shells | Conch Shells |
| Coquina Clam Shells | Lightning and Channeled Whelks |
| Moon Snail Shells | Oyster Shells |
| Pen Shells | Sand Dollars |
| Scallop Shells | Scotch Bonnets |
| Slipper Shells | Tulip Shells |

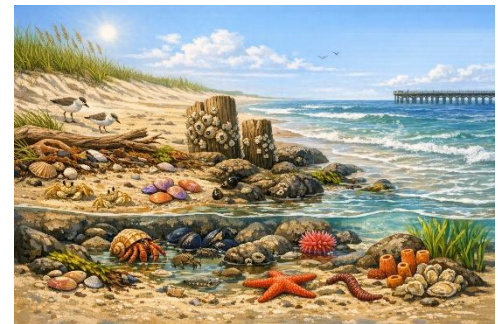


Pop Quiz: Do you know what the state shell of North Carolina is? It's the Scotch Bonnet! It's a beautiful shell and you are incredibly lucky if you find one.

- › **Keep an eye out for shark teeth.** Shark teeth are found quite often on Topsail Island and are a coastal treasure all their own. When you think about shark teeth washing ashore on Topsail's beaches, images of giant, fossilized Megalodon teeth may come to mind but there are plenty of smaller, more common shark tooth finds to be found, too. Most common are:
 - Bull Shark Teeth
 - Tiger Shark Teeth
 - Sand Shark Teeth

- › **Don't forget about sea glass hunting.** You see a glint of shine and reflection in the sand drawing you closer to see what's catching your eye. It's most likely sea glass in a variety of colors of the rainbow. Some are rarer than others, but they're all uniquely gorgeous in their own way. Keep your eyes open for some as you stroll the sand.

Tidepooling & Shallow Water Treasure Search – Head into the shallows for a hands-on exploration of Topsail Island's intertidal zone — one of the most dynamic and fascinating habitats along the coast. As the tide recedes, students search for natural "treasures" while discovering how life adapts to a world that's underwater one moment and sun-baked the next. Guided by a local expert, the group investigates each zone of the shoreline, from the splash zone where driftwood and seaweed wash ashore, to the high-tide zone where barnacles cling to rocks and pilings.



In the mid-tide pools, students often find the most exciting creatures: hermit crabs, sea stars, anemones, and other marine invertebrates that thrive in these temporary pockets of water. During extreme low tides, the low-tide zone may reveal rarer species like sea cucumbers and sponges. It's an immersive, curiosity-driven experience that blends marine biology, geology, and exploration — perfect for students eager to get their feet wet and discover the hidden world between land and sea.

Campfire, S'mores & Storytelling of Pirates & Shipwrecks - After a full afternoon on the coast, the group gathers for a local dinner before settling in around the campfire for an evening of stories, stargazing, and s'mores. As the fire crackles, an expert storyteller brings North Carolina's maritime past to life with tales of daring pirates, hidden treasure, and legendary shipwrecks that once haunted these waters. It's a relaxed, memorable night filled with laughter, imagination, and the timeless tradition of sharing stories by the fire — the perfect way to end a day on the Carolina coast.



Day 3 – Surf City & Hammocks Beach

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today's activities include:

The Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue & Rehabilitation Center – Students visit the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue & Rehabilitation Center, a nationally recognized organization dedicated to the conservation and protection of all marine turtle species. The center's mission comes to life through the rescue, medical care, and release of sick or injured sea turtles, as well as through powerful public education programs and hands-on learning opportunities for future biologists, veterinarians, and conservationists. During the visit, students explore how human activity, habitat loss, and environmental change impact sea turtles — and how science, community action, and rehabilitation efforts help protect these endangered animals.



North Carolina's nesting season runs from mid-May through August, when female Loggerhead Sea Turtles return to their natal beaches to lay three to five nests per season, each holding around 120 eggs. Students learn how the eggs incubate for about 60 days before hatchlings emerge together and race toward the ocean, facing predators like ghost crabs, birds, and fish along the way. Only about 1 in 1,000 hatchlings survives the first year, and as few as 1 in 5,000–10,000 reach adulthood — a journey that takes 20 to 30 years. Those that survive will one day return to the same stretch of beach where they were born, continuing a cycle that has existed for millions of years. This experience offers students a meaningful look at marine biology, conservation science, and the extraordinary resilience of sea turtles.

Hammocks Beach State Park & Ranger Program – Located along the Southern Outer Banks and also known as the Crystal Coast, Hammocks Beach State Park protects more than 1,600 acres of pristine coastal wilderness. Its crown jewel, Bear Island, is a largely untouched barrier island featuring sweeping dunes, pockets of maritime forest, salt marsh, and wide, south-facing beaches. With limited development and scarce freshwater, the island supports wildlife that has flown, swum, or drifted in through tidal creeks and marshes, creating a rare opportunity to experience coastal habitats in their most natural state.



During the visit, students participate in specialized Ranger-led programs tailored to their age group and the season. Offerings may include a Sea Turtle Trek, Delightful Dolphins, Barrier Island Ecology, or Seashells & Treasure, each designed to deepen understanding of the island’s ecosystems and the species that depend on them. Hammocks Beach provides an unforgettable blend of science, exploration, and wild coastal beauty — a perfect setting for hands-on learning along North Carolina’s southern Outer Banks.



Beach Martial Arts Class – Join a Martial Artist on the beach in a stretching and movement class to get you refocused and feeling great. Learn about ancient martial arts forms that rejuvenate your movement and refresh your attitude. Maybe even try a bit of karate!

If time remains, we can explore beach shops, walk the pier, talk to local fisherman or even go back to our hotel for rest, relaxation, pool time or games. This evening, we’ll have dinner locally.

Day 4 – Wilmington

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Wilmington... Wilmington is a vibrant coastal city where centuries of history meet the energy of a modern waterfront community. Set along the Cape Fear River and just minutes from the Atlantic, Wilmington blends historic districts, cobblestone streets, and colorful riverfront shops with a thriving arts scene and a strong connection to the water. Students experience a city shaped by colonial settlement, maritime trade, and World War II shipbuilding, all while exploring a landscape filled with live oaks, tidal creeks, and coastal wildlife. From the Riverwalk to the beaches of Wrightsville and Carolina Beach, Wilmington offers a dynamic introduction to North Carolina’s coastal culture.

This region is also home to some of the state’s most compelling stories and learning opportunities. The towering Battleship *North Carolina* anchors the riverfront as a living museum of WWII history, while nearby islands and estuaries reveal the ecological richness of the Cape Fear coast. Whether students are discovering local marine life, stepping into historic sites, or simply taking in the views along the river, Wilmington provides a memorable blend of science, history, and coastal adventure — the perfect gateway to exploring North Carolina’s southeastern shore.



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Battleship North Carolina Tour - Moored with quiet dignity along the Cape Fear River, the Battleship *North Carolina* invites students to step aboard one of the most decorated American warships of World War II. As they explore the decks, engine rooms, mess halls, and crew quarters, students gain a powerful sense of what daily life was like for the young sailors who served in the Pacific Theater — many of whom had grown up during the Great Depression and answered the call to defend their country.



Throughout the tour, personal stories come to life through photographs, artifacts, and oral histories that highlight the courage, sacrifice, and resilience of the crew. From navigating tight passageways to standing beside the massive guns that once shook the ocean, students experience history in a way that feels immediate and real. It's an unforgettable opportunity to step back in time and connect with the human stories behind one of America's great naval icons.

Fort Fisher State Historic Site & Civil War Museum - During the Civil War, Wilmington served as the Confederacy's most vital port, and Fort Fisher stood as its guardian. Nicknamed the "*Gibraltar of America*" for its massive earthen walls, underground bunkers, and powerful artillery, the fort protected blockade-runners who slipped millions of dollars' worth of supplies past Union ships. Its strategic importance made it a prime target, and after two major assaults, Union forces finally captured Fort Fisher in January 1865, cutting off the South's last major supply line.



A visit to Fort Fisher brings this turning point in American history to life. Students explore the reconstructed earthworks, walk the grounds where the largest joint Army–Navy operation of the war unfolded, and learn how the fall of the fort helped hasten the end of the conflict just three months later. The museum's exhibits and artifacts deepen the experience, offering a powerful look at the people, technology, and decisions that shaped the outcome of the Civil War.

North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher & Marine Master Class - At the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher, students step into a living coastal laboratory where marine science comes alive through hands-on exploration and close-up encounters. They'll feel the smooth glide of stingrays in the touch pool, climb through the interactive Adventure Reef to see how habitats shape animal behavior, and watch a scuba diver swim among sharks, eels, and hundreds of reef fish while explaining how aquarists care for ocean life. Exhibits highlight everything from delicate seahorses to a rare albino alligator, giving students a deeper look at the biodiversity of North Carolina's coastal ecosystems.



Throughout the visit, students connect science with real-world conservation as they observe rescued sea turtles in rehabilitation, learn how shoreline habitats are protected, and discover the challenges facing marine species today. This master class blends curiosity, ecology, and environmental stewardship in a way that leaves a lasting impression — inspiring students to understand, respect, and protect the fragile coastal world around them.

After a full day exploring Wilmington's history and marine life, the group gathers for a final evening of connection and reflection.

Reflection Circle - Before heading to the airport, students gather for a final reflection on their week - a chance to celebrate everything they've learned, experienced, and accomplished together. From hands-on STEM labs to behind-the-scenes discoveries, they look back on the moments that challenged them, inspired them, and brought the group closer. It's a warm, meaningful pause in the day where students share highlights, thank their leaders, and recognize how much they've grown. With new confidence, new friendships, and a deeper understanding of the world around them, the group begins their journey home - carrying memories that will stay with them long after the trip ends.

Day 5 – Goodbye North Carolina!

Breakfast included; lunch & dinner on own

As your program comes to a close, we hope students leave feeling inspired by the history they've walked through, the science they've explored, and the memories they've created together. From hands-on learning to unforgettable shared experiences, this journey is designed to spark curiosity, build confidence, and strengthen connections that last long after the trip ends. Thank you for traveling with us and for trusting our team to guide your students through this meaningful adventure. We wish you a safe trip home and look forward to welcoming you on another Hammock Expeditions experience in the future.



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TIDES OF DISCOVERY – MIDDLE SCHOOL EDITION

Minimum Booking Numbers: 20 students

What's Included:

- Roundtrip flights or motorcoach transportation
- 4-nights' accommodation in the Sneads Ferry area
- North Carolina airport transfers plus transportation for noted activities
- Breakfasts & dinners daily starting with dinner on arrival and ending with breakfast on departure (dependent upon flight times)
- Mountain-to-Sea Trail Ecology Trek & Master Class with a Naturalist Group Volunteer Project on the Mountains-to-Sea Trail
- Shellfish Sustainability Master Class
- Beach Combing, Shark Tooth Hunt, Tidepooling & Shallow Water Treasure Hunt
- Bonfire & S'mores + Pirate & Shipwreck Tales Storyteller
- Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue & Rehabilitation Center
- Beach Martial Arts Class with a Martial Artist
- Hammocks Beach State Park & Ranger Program
- Battleship North Carolina – Private Tour
- Fort Fisher State Historic Site & Civil War Museum
- North Carolina Aquarium & Marine Master Class
- 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.



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