

SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS AND THE LOCAL CHURCH - PART II

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More than two million North Americans will go on a short-term mission trip this year. Beyond the significant spiritual preparation required there are also some practical areas which require preparation, prudence and due diligence. In Part 11 of Short-Term Mission Trips and the Local Church, we will be covering:

- Stress, Safety and Security
- Communications
- Transporting Money Overseas

Stress, Safety and Security - When considering a short-term mission trip, it is beneficial to first consider the stress level of the cross-cultural experience that you might be ready to embrace.

Stress Level	Location	Language	Living/Traveling Dynamics	Ethnicity
lower	In Canada	Same	Familiar Large Group	Different
moderate	Outside Canada	Different	Familiar Small Group	Different
higher	Outside Canada	Different	Individual	Different

It becomes essential with each added component that increased measures are taken in order to ensure safety and security for the mission team members.

Preparation Tips

1. Research your chosen destination

- Internet, Libraries, Country Profiles, Newspapers, Travel Book
- Travel Warnings, Public Announcements, Overseas Security Advisory Newsletters
- Weather Reports for concerns and to prepare for packing

2. Start basic language learning

- Yahoo and Google Translation tools
- Target Language Dictionaries and Books

3. Missionary Connection to Nationals

- Ensure the Team Leader has a network among the nationals, can easily speak the language and is aware of emergency protocols
- Partner with a missionary that your organization already supports or obtain a referral

from your denominational office

- Research the culture, gestures and body language

4. Health Information

- Immunizations - plan to have them at least four weeks prior to departure
- Medications - must be clearly labeled and in the original containers
- Research what you need to bring with you and how to stay healthy during your trip (Food, Water, Avoiding Injuries, HIV, Fungal and Parasitic Infections)
- Medical Insurance – utilize the same provider for all team members to ease administration

5. Travel Information

- Research the airline to understand cancellation policies and weight restrictions
- Arrive early to check in, clear security and locate the gate for departure
- Consult the transportation Safety Administration website for the latest information on security

6. Documentation Information

- A valid Passport with expiration date at least six months after anticipated end date of the mission trip
- Leave a photocopy of your passport at home or with someone from the sending agency who could fax it to you or the Embassy should it be necessary
- Determine if a Visa is required and the procedures applicable to your destination
- Complete forms relevant to the short-term mission trip such as Volunteer Service Application, Release providing Consent, Certification and Assumption of Risk Form, Emergency Contact Form, Medical Release, and Travel Waiver

Communications - With the advancement and availability of technology, short-term mission members have the ability to be in touch with family as well as updating the sending agency. It, therefore, becomes important to disclose to team members and families as to the amount and availability of communication in order not to deter from the purpose of the short-term mission assignment. This may also include predetermination as to circumstances that may warrant a member to be contacted or asked to return home (e.g. death of a non immediate family member).

Communication Tips

1. Telephone

- A Global Prepaid calling card is the cheapest and easiest method to complete calls both to the overseas missionary as well as to contact family from a telephone in the airport
- Team Leaders should have a cell phone with a built in satellite to access worldwide service
- Research the time difference at your chosen destination before placing a telephone call

2. Internet

- Consider obtaining a Global email account such as EarthLink, which has access numbers in more than 70 countries
- Check with the in-country host/missionary to determine if a computer is available with Internet Access
- Ensure you have a list of emergency numbers and email addresses with you as well as provide a copy for your family or sending agency

Transporting Money Overseas – The benefit for members of short-term mission trips is that most are offered as an all-inclusive upfront package. However, sometimes there are incidences when money must be transported overseas. In this situation, it is prudent to take extra caution to consider options and safety measures.

Finance Tips - Utilize a currency converter that is applicable to your chosen destination. Be aware that some countries may exchange into several currencies (e.g. CDN to USD to Gourdes to Haitian Dollars)

- Carry a small calculator with a sample template taped to the back to reference when completing purchases to ensure you understand the value of the converted money
- Never use a street vendor to exchange money as this is illegal and an increased security risk, rather check with the team leader or missionary on where to exchange money
- Do not keep all your financial assets in one location. Rather, place some in your wallet, a hidden source and the remainder inside your clothes utilizing a concealed money belt
- Have a variety of bills, especially smaller denominations since often many vendors are unable to make change for large amounts

Personal Funds - Every member of the team should decide for themselves how much they wish to take with them for personal purchases. Experienced Team Leaders should provide guidelines of minimum and maximum amounts to ensure members have sufficient monies to cover incidentals such as taxis, baggage assistance, extra meals, and souvenirs.

Team Funds - A common challenge for Team Leaders involves sending money internationally for projects that are to be completed during the mission trip or to provide for the needs of the team while at the chosen destination.

Options include:

1. **Credit Card** - most major credit cards are recognized world wide and can be utilized for emergencies or large purchases. The limit should be considered and it is often advisable to let your Financial Institution know that you are going overseas and may utilize your credit card. The amount charged to your credit card will be placed in US dollars and then converted to Canadian. Conversion and administration fees can apply to all purchases. Often credit cards are not

accepted in rural areas and Less Developed Countries (LDC).

2. Traveller's Cheques - this is an excellent method if you are traveling since these offer complete replacement if you lose them. However, most short-term mission trips venture well beyond most commercial establishments. Roadside vendors and businesses do not have the methods to cash traveller's cheques and request cash transactions only. It is advisable to cash the traveller's cheques when arriving at the airport or in the city before heading off to a remote destination. Service charges can apply when completing the purchasing and cashing transactions of traveller's cheques. Always keep a list of the serial and contact numbers separate from the cheques so that they can be easily reported and replaced.

3. Automated Teller Machine (ATM) - this has become one of the most popular methods to obtain monies in foreign countries. However, like credit cards and traveller's cheques, once you move away from the commercial centers, the ability to locate an ATM becomes extremely limited. In order to access an international ATM, a 4-digit code is a requirement. Many ATM's located in LDC's can be unreliable as the technology is often incompatible with our systems.

4. Wire Transfer - many of the in-country hosts or missionaries have a bank account set up to receive funds. This is an excellent method, if used well in advance, to ensure monies are delivered with lead time to pay for expenses and projects for the short-term mission trip.

5. Cash - while this method is the easiest, a large amount of cash either carried by the Team Leader or divided up among the members increases the security risk for every team member. Also, if the funds have been changed to the foreign currency and are not utilized, the exchange back to Canadian will usually result in a loss of money overall. When obtaining currency, check to ensure that the bills are dated 2000 or newer, are not torn and have no writings on them as many overseas countries either will not accept them or will attempt to discount the money when exchanged.

While the tools and tips for short-term mission trip preparation are endless, diligent planning will maximize a positive experience and minimize hazards and risks for the sending agency, team leaders, and members.