

Making the Most of your Short-term Mission Trip

Spiritual Tourism vs. True Mission Trips

Introduction:

Well-planned short-term mission trips can transform participants in light of their mission knowledge, igniting an “all-peoples passion” that will be carried back to the church where they serve. If done correctly, mission trips can bless the missionary family on the field by reminding them they are not forgotten and that their work is valued and prayed for. Taking a group from your church to share God’s Word with the nations will have a lasting eternal impact on the people they go to serve. It is a unique opportunity to join the work God is doing around the globe.

We may have heard the negative aspects of a short-term trip. However, with careful preparation and wisdom you can avoid that result.

What are the pitfalls?

1. **A wrong view of missions.** Missions is not merely about one Christian going to a different culture to plant a church, dig a well, build a building, teach English, have VBS, or crossing cultures to give them a material thing they do not have.

Missions is making Christ known in all the earth for the glory of God with the final goal being a multitude from every language, people, tribe, and nation knowing and worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. The prior list opens doors to do that.

I Chronicles 16:24 “*Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*”

2. **A wrong view of ourselves.** Though unspoken, and even unintentional, we can view ourselves as having material goods and money to offer. We may come bearing privilege and even our nationalism. Patriotism is not wrong, but do not carry your flag to the field.

It is important for us to know how the people of other countries view us as Americans. In some places, our owning more than one pair of shoes or wearing a watch can be understood as wealth and affluence. Others may view us with suspicion and mistrust. Both extremes can greatly affect how the message of the Gospel is received.

3. **A wrong view of the nationals.** We can have a God-complex. We see ourselves as their rescuers (they only have one Rescuer). This gives us a warm fuzzy and we all like that. I call this the *Great White Hope Syndrome*.

The key is for hearts to be prepared beforehand. If you are leading a group, help them in a correct view of missions, making Christ’s name known as the central theme in all you attempt.

The lasting benefits of a short-term mission trip.

1. Sharing the Gospel – Gospel-centered mission trips benefit everyone involved.

- A.** The community where you are ministering hears the Gospel and sees it played out in those who came to serve. If you are fortunate enough to be involved in a church-plant, you are essentially assisting in the birth of a new community for Christ.
- B.** Your hosts benefit greatly from additional help in spreading the Gospel. Do not discount the far-reaching measure of encouragement in this area!
- C.** Short-term trip participants gain experience, practice, and boldness to share the Gospel.
- D.** Home churches reap the benefits of mission teams when they return home with fresh zeal, rallying others to missions.

2. Giving encouragement – When trip participants sacrifice time and resources to serve alongside missionaries on the field, missionaries sense the love, respect, and support of those back home. Other local Christians may be stirred to serve alongside them also.

3. Experiencing spiritual growth – A natural by-product of a short-term mission trip is experiencing God working in the participants' lives. A Chinese proverb states, "I heard, and I forgot. I saw, and I remembered. I did it, and I understood." Mission trips help us experience God's transformative power first-hand.

4. Gaining a global perspective – Mission trips expand our view of God's immense love for all people. It helps us uncover His plan for the nations and how we begin to discover our role in it. Short-term mission trips can give participants the nudge to learn a language and study cultures more intensely. These interests will change participants, awakening a humble desire to serve others when they return home.

5. Clarifying a call – Many long-term missionaries begin their mission career on a short-term trip. Removing distractions from our lives heightens awareness of God's purpose in us. Short-term mission trips helps us understand the promptings of the Holy Spirit as removed from our comfort zones, serving in an unfamiliar context.

In preparation for your trip, focus on the following three groups:

1. **The missionary family on the field** – pack suitcases just for the family. Find out what their favorite treats are and any needs they have. A missionary lady on the field can be blessed with packaged mixes or a slow cooker. Consider tools the missionary might need or clothes for growing children.

Consider services you might perform for the missionary himself. Does his house need painted, or windows washed? Do they need an afternoon away or a dinner out? Your missionary host will likely be preparing for the arrival of your team weeks in advance. This often means extra cooking, cleaning, and additional expenses.

2. **The people you are going to serve** – Plan in advance for the precious souls you will encounter. Take Scriptures and tracts for evangelism. Pray for God to prepare hearts and for your team to be spiritually ready to share the Gospel.

As a team, before departure, set aside a benevolence offering and prayerfully ask the Lord to show your participants where it can be used to fill a need.

Provide sustainable ministry ideas for the church and missionary on the field. Leave behind what you take. It does not benefit the missionary or the local congregation to come in like a circus with a spectacular show, only to leave in a few days and take the show back home,

3. **The team you take**
 - a. Meet often for prayer and special projects
 - b. Have a theme verse.
 - c. Work on special projects as a group that will be used on your trip (puppet stage, music workshop; VBS props).
 - d. Basic language skills
 - e. **Prepare your group for cultural differences.** Some will be obvious, others more subtle. The missionary family will be your best resource for this information.
 - f. **Beware of ethnocentrism.** – definition: using your own culture as a frame of reference to judge the culture and practices of another; assuming people are backward or primitive if they do not speak your language; believing your way of doing things is superior. (We all are guilty of it. We must train ourselves to correct our way of thinking.)

Short-term mission trips provide an enormous gateway to a long-term impact on lives. One trip of spiritually and culturally prepared participants can launch a missions movement at home or abroad as well as rallying others to the Great Commission of making Christ known in all the earth.