

Survival Guide for Short Term Mission Trips

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Getting ready to go:

- *Fund-raising and prayer partner recruiting* –
Even if you have your own money and can pay your own trip, fund-raising is important because it also raises prayer interest. The people who support you will pray for you. It is also an act of humility to ask people to help with your trip. Make a list of friends, family and churches who might be interested in your trip. Prepare a letter explaining the privilege of the trip and what you are going to do. Tell your future supporters that you are relying on God and need His power in answer to their prayers. Take the amount of money you need and break it into doable pieces. For example, if you need \$2,000.00 – if you have 100 “\$20 gifts” your need is supplied. Send the letter with an envelope that has your return address on it and for tax deduction purposes, your name cannot be anywhere on the check. A tax deduction matters to some people, but not to others.
- *Health preparations* –
In order to enter some countries, you need to have certain shots. For example, yellow fever is required in some African countries. Make sure that your tetanus booster is in date (for all trips). Many tropical areas, you will need to take anti-malaria medication. There are different types – it depends on where you are going which types will be necessary. I typically take Lariam (mefloquine HCL). Diseases like cholera and typhoid are water born, and as long as you are careful about the water you drink, they will not be a problem. Other preventative measures are up to you or you can discuss them with your doctor. I suggest taking generic “Cipro” (available for \$4) as a safety precaution.
- *Clothing choices* –
We need to be careful...sometimes clothing choices have cultural impact. Wearing clothing in public that shows the knee is in poor taste in many countries. Typically business casual is acceptable for preaching or traveling in country. Blue jeans would be ok for travel and perhaps in country, depending. Women should be careful to be dressed modestly. Tropical places are hot and humid, so cotton is a good choice. I, as a leader of the team, have reserved the right to tell a team member to change clothes. The most porous and vulnerable membrane on your body is the skin between your toes. Therefore, because of the unsanitary conditions, open-toed shoes don't make sense and you should avoid them. Wearing flip-flops inside the hotel or a place of residence is fine.
- *Getting a Visa (not the credit card type)* –
First order is to make sure your passport is up to date. This can take a couple of months, so plan accordingly. Most countries require an entry visa. Check on this at the beginning of your preparation. The visa will require filing paperwork, submitting passport photos and a significant amount of money. You will be required to send in your passport with the visa application. It usually takes three weeks. You can have it expedited, an additional cost.
- *Food choices* –
A significant step in ensuring that we avoid illness and maintain our working edge is our choice of food. Increasingly, the opportunity to go to restaurants is available. However, you need to keep in mind that what an American feels is a reasonably cheap rate for a meal – when compared to the natives' days wage is an exorbitant feast, so we need to be culturally sensitive. Often because of our travel schedule, it is not conducive to stop and eat

somewhere. Most places where the natives will eat – because of water and hygiene, an American should not eat. So, we need to take a good portion of our meals. I have found the following to be easy to carry, quick to eat and nutritious: peanut butter, crackers, protein bars, dehydrated fruit and vegetables, trail mix. Typically there is electricity available, so a hot pot can be used. (Dual voltage hot pots are an efficient purchase if you choose to travel frequently.) Some have found military MRE's (Meals-ready-to-eat) to be good.

Spiritual preparation:

In your mind, you know you are going on a mission trip and not a vacation, but sometimes it is easy to slip into thinking that this is kind of something I'll go "do." You are entering an area that has been a wholly owned subsidiary of Satan for centuries, and he does not give up easily. You can expect to be tempted more frequently and more energetically than normal. Satan will attempt to set members of teams at odds with one another. He will do what is necessary among Christian workers to attempt to discredit Jesus and His message.

You personally need to take responsibility to be prepared spiritually and emotionally for the trip. I suggest that you select two spiritually mature friends or family members who can pray with you as you prepare spiritually (men pray for men and women pray for women). Make sure that your devotional time and prayer life are intact. Make sure that you have forgiven everyone in your life that you have had reason to forgive. And make sure that you are in a habit of NOT holding onto resentment. (Ephesians 4:26, 27) I urge you not to take this lightly and I am very willing to discuss this further with you.

Dealing with long flights & jet lag:

- *Walk in airports –*
Usually you will have time during a layover to walk a mile or so. This is important, even if you are tired. Travel often includes stringing together two or more long flights. Your body needs the break. Walking helps to keep your body going in the right direction – we were created that way.
- *Sleep on the plane –*
I have found that noise-cancelling earphones, a neck pillow, and eyeshades create an atmosphere conducive for sleep. There are over-the-counter sleep aids that can allow you to rest (like 'Midnight'). Generally on long flights there is a three to five hour gap between food and beverage services. It supplies a quiet time to get a couple hours of sleep. I would avoid taking anything that spaces you out for much longer (unless you are able to curl up by a window the whole flight). Realize that it is good for you to move around during the flight also. Long naps while on long flights help reduce the affects of jet lag for me.
- *Stay awake until dark –*
Once you have arrived at your destination place, the place where you will serve, do your best to stay awake until dark. If necessary, a power nap will help you bridge the gap until night time. As you reset your body clock (circadian rhythm) to darkness and light in this new place, you will be more able to beat jet lag.

Overseas hygiene & preventing illness:

- *Drinking water –*
You are going to be at your location to do ministry a brief period of time. Drinking the wrong water can be a mistake that will render your time ineffective. Even what seems to be pure

water has bacteria and perhaps other parasites that your body is not accustomed to. So, diligence about drinking water is of prime importance. In this day and age, bottled water is usually available. Be careful, always, that the lid is sealed. It has been known to find “rebottled” water. I highly recommend that you take iodized water treatment tablets as insurance that safe water will always be available. One such treatment is “Potable Water.” Another possibility is to boil water for a minimum of 10 minutes. Make sure the water for brushing your teeth is also bottled as the water coming out of the faucet may not be safe. Rinsing your toothbrush with that water is not necessarily safe. Also, be careful not to ingest the water when you are taking a shower. I use “Potable Water” as the final rinse of utensils, cups and plates that I have washed.

- *Choices of food to eat –*

I gave a list of things that I bring from the States in the “Getting Ready to Go” section. I’ll take a moment to mention things you can buy “in country.” Tropical fruit and fresh vegetables are often available. Some factory packaged foods can also be found.

Make sure that the skins of fruits and vegetables that you purchase are not broken. Use disinfecting wipes on the skin or wash them with an anti-bacterial solution before peeling and eating (the final rinse should not be with local water). Ziploc bags are the short-term missionary’s best friend.

- *Rest –*

Adequate rest will matter greatly so that you can do your spiritual work. I have found that a small air mattress can really help even out the differences in beds, making rest time more familiar. A sound machine or ear plugs can be useful tools – you can experience city noise, jungle noise & roosters crowing at all times. Some find eye-shades to be very valuable. Many times, you will be able to have accommodations with air-conditioning. Otherwise, know that there are battery operated portable fans that are easy to carry and economically priced. There are sleep aids (over the counter & natural) that can aid in relaxation in a strange environment.

Napping can be a life saver. Power napping (15-20 minute rest periods) can help. If you have never tried it, I suggest that you experiment before you leave for your trip.

- *Cleanliness of accommodations –*

C-pap cleaner is both anti-bacterial and anti-viral. It comes in a concentrated form so a little bit goes a long way. You can mix it when you arrive at the place where you will stay and use it to clean toilets, sinks, shower areas and hard surfaces. It is best to spray it and let it sit for a prescribed length of time (about 10 minutes usually) before rinsing. I have found it to be low-odor, also. I choose to carry slip-over plastic mattress covers (I bring both twin & regular sizes) – these take care of dust mites and other potential problems if the bed is not clean to our standards.

Crossing Cultures:

- *Meeting & greeting –*

Greeting others is important. Greeting them according to their cultural norm is very important. Take your cues from those who have been where you are going, or from your native hosts. If the local people offer a typical American greeting (shake hands, etc.), then feel free to follow their lead; however, your first greeting should be in their cultural way, rather than American. Sometimes it is ok for men to greet women (and vice versa), sometimes the cues are different. It is better to allow your host people to initiate physical greetings until you have learned what is appropriate.

- *Conversation –*
Conversation with someone when English is not their first language can be challenging. Don't for a moment let yourself think, "This person is not too bright." Most of them speak more than two languages. I have yet to meet anyone in Africa who doesn't speak three! Be patient, be considerate and prayerful and you will find yourself communicating adequately.

Listen for their terminology – ex. “take a decision” – and use that (it is probably a direct translation from their language to English). Often you will need an interpreter to talk with your host Christians. Jump at the opportunity to discuss life and our Lord.

Recognize, if you are in a place where few speak English, that after you are there for a while, you will naturally feel a bond with anyone who does speak English. Be careful! Just because someone speaks English does not mean that they tell the truth. Also, do not let this affect your mission or change your relationship with your international hosts.

- *Take the roll of a learner –*
Your hosts and local Christians are the experts in their culture (you are not). Even though you are going to help, you do not have all the answers (or even most of them). They live in their culture, they survive in their culture, and they understand life in their culture. Your task is to care about them and their lives, not to turn them into Americans. So go in humility, remembering that you are a guest in their culture. The more you can learn and understand the better you can pray for them and the better Christian brother / sister you will be from now through eternity.

Dealing with life “there:”

- *Poverty –*
Most places that our mission trips take us have living standards far below what we are accustomed to in America. That is true of much of the world. Often you will learn while there – “a person can be happy, even when they are poor.” Poverty is relative. What looks to us like unbelievable poverty is day-to-day life among the people who we are visiting. I look for two things as a gauge to determine the difference between a low standard of living and abject poverty:
 - 1) First, are the people's bodies filled out or are they skin and bones? If they have “meat on their bones” then they are eating regularly – they are not in abject poverty nor are they experiencing malnutrition.
 - 2) Secondly, are their clothes clean? If so, they have more than one pair of clothes – once again, they are not experiencing abject poverty. This may sound harsh and uncaring, but I ask you to think with me – we cannot alleviate all suffering, can we?

If they are eating and have sufficient clothing, they are doing well, comparatively speaking. We need to see their spiritual condition as far more important than their physical and economic condition.

- *Giving money away –*
Please pay particular attention here, because you will find yourself wanting to hand out money when you see “poverty” and you can do far more harm than good if you do so. Soon after I arrive in a place that is new to me, I try to determine what a worker is paid for a day's work (sometimes also what an elementary school teacher is paid). I use this knowledge to determine the value of money for the people with whom I am working.

If a day's wage is \$2 (that sounds very, very small to us, doesn't it?), we need to compare it to a day's wage in the United States – approximately \$60 for minimum wage workers. In other words, the money you would give away is seen as 30 times greater to the people you are visiting. So \$10 = \$300.

If Christian groups came to visit you every other month and someone regularly handed you \$500 or \$1,000, would it begin to change the way you think about them? Would you begin to see them as a money tree or faucet? Be careful, developing world people already see Americans as "made of money;" we want them to look to God for their blessings and not Americans.

- *Acceptable spacing –*

Every culture has appropriate distances between people, based on the level of depth of conversation. Think about the distances we expect as Americans: we greet one another from across the street; we discuss the weather and most open subjects two or three feet apart; and very close (nearly touching) distances are reserved for secrets or intimate discussions.

In much of the developing world, those distances are greatly reduced – so much so that it can become uncomfortable to an American. The weather is discussed at "secret distance" and holding hands is the way to show "this conversation is private, stay away." At times you will see men walking together holding hands (women do this also). Don't be concerned, they simply are in a private conversation. Observe your host culture and you will soon learn acceptable and appropriate distances for conversation.

You can use hand-holding to your advantage: when I need to get my ministry partner's attention, I will touch his hand – he immediately turns toward me. Once, in India, two American women were shopping, the crowd noticed them and began to draw a little too close; one grabbed the other's hand and the crowd instinctively backed off. They had room to go out and head back to their hotel.

- *Time –*

There are generally two ways in the world to answer the question, "When does it start?" 1) Clock oriented. 2) Event oriented. Our culture is clock oriented. Things begin and are expected to end based on the clock. Many people in the developing world are event oriented. The event is what matters, when it begins and ends are not such a big thing. This can cause real anxiety in a person who is clock oriented. That person can even become angry with our host culture – "These people do not respect time!" Remember, we are guests in their culture; they are correct. Be prepared to accept life from the "event oriented" position and *relax*.

Preaching & teaching – working with an interpreter:

- General tips:

- 1) Speak in sentences (complete thoughts) – languages have different word orders (syntax) and your interpreter will need to hear subject and object and verb tense to adequately translate.
- 2) Slow down, but don't crawl. Speak your words clearly and succinctly, enunciate. Your interpreter is a very intelligent person, don't speak too slowly. You will grow to understand each other as you work together.
- 3) Be aware that some interpreters can understand English very well, yet lack confidence to speak it adequately. So, they can be a good translator and a poor conversationalist. The Word of God will still effectively reach people.

- 4) Be prepared to explain what you mean to your interpreter. They may not understand your choice of words, yet fully understand the topic. Avoid slang.
- We are not in our host country to impress them with our intelligence or great wit or with our lives as Americans; we are there to speak of the greatness of our Lord Jesus and the truth of God's Word. Simple is good (Paul's stated ministry method – see 1 Corinthians). For evangelistic messages, I have found accounts from the life of Jesus and his parables to be very effective and simple. It is helpful to give examples from your own life and experience.
 - You will develop a rhythm with your interpreter. The longer you work together, the easier it will become. Often the interpreter will ask to see the text or the outline of your message, along with scriptures, in advance. Having these available enhances his or her comfort level.

Expect extra temptation:

- I cannot emphasize this often enough or forcefully enough – you will be entering a place that has been controlled by Satan; he does not give up easily.
Temptations increase: - in hopes you will sin and bring shame to the name of Christ.
- to hinder you from fulfilling your mission
- to render your team ineffective
- Be prepared to deal with the temptations.... Don't be caught by surprise. I have learned to imitate Jesus' example and quote scripture when I am being tempted. Satan backs off. He returns, but I am ready to quote scripture again (often the same passage).
- You will find yourself losing patience with others, due to lack of sleep, different eating habits, reduced personal time, human nature and the attacks of the evil one. Do not allow him to trip you up and cause lasting resentment.
- You may find yourself in a "budding romance" with a local person or a team member. Put those feelings on hold – recognize that is not the purpose for your trip and it can be a distraction from Satan. Sometimes local young men show interest in American women in hopes that they can marry and move to America. (It can work for women toward men also). Don't let our enemy sidetrack you from the Lord's work – this is short term, you will have opportunities to make life decisions later.
- I have an mp3 of a message I preach throughout the world, "Overcoming Temptation." I will send it to you upon request – mullenix.tom@gmail.com

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Tom has made over 30 short term mission trips, both individually and leading teams. It is from these experiences that he shares this survival guide. He has partnered with an International Christian leader in the Ivory Coast, West Africa since 1988. This work has grown from one church with 27 believers to over 50 churches and over 4,000 believers.

Twelve21 Mission wants to encourage the effective use of short term mission trips, communication technology and wise partnership with International Christian leaders to effectively extend "the borders" of Christ's kingdom.

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