BEST TIPS to prepare for a SHORT-TERM TRIP

A great portion of my work here at Baptist Mid-Missions has to do with arranging short-term trips for college students. Our sincere desire is that these trips will have maximum impact in students’ lives and that the service they render will also have lasting effects. If that is to happen, preparation prior to the trip is both necessary and important. In this edition of VISION, it will be our purpose to help those contemplating such trips to prepare themselves in such a way that they’ll achieve maximum impact. We trust the tips we are about to share will be helpful.

—Steve Fulks, Editor

TIP 8

Cultural considerations
Be sure to go with an open mind. More than likely, you will experience cultural differences during your trip. It is vital to remember that the Jesus we know is the same Jesus known by believers—and needed by unbelievers—in a foreign land. This still requires cultural sensitivity and alertness to our biases. The manner in which church services are conducted in a foreign culture may not be exactly what we experience here in our own country. Remember, you are now the foreigner. As it relates to language, try to learn a few key phrases, know how to give part of your testimony, and be able to sing a few choruses in the country’s native tongue. Taking the time to learn the language displays the servant attitude you are seeking to instill in others. Learn the proper ways to greet people and to say goodbye, and learn what gestures to avoid. Be prepared for some lifestyle restrictions due to culture and/or safety. You should follow the lead of your host in this regard. Make an effort to eat different foods, especially when eating with nationals. If something shocks you, endeavor to keep your face straight and hold your comments until you are sure you are in private.

TIP 9

Be a servant
Remember the reason you are there is to serve, not to be served. It is crucial that you maintain a regular and Bible-centered devotional time. Before you minister, you must be ministered to. Be available. You may be asked to do some things in your ministry that you have never done before. Don’t sell yourself or God short! Counseling can be tricky across cultures. You are safe in staying with giving instruction and help from the Bible. Ask for help when you need it—a smart counselor does not claim to have all the answers. Always defer to those with more experience—both nationals and missionaries. Consider keeping a journal of your experience. Later, this will help you rehearse all that God did for you during your time on the mission field.

TIP 10

Did we mention communication?
Communicate, communicate, communicate! At this point you may be thinking, “You already said that in #2.” You are right, I did. However the direction of this communication is different. It is very important that you communicate with those who have made it possible for you to make this trip. They need to understand how their investment has made a difference. While on your trip, have a goal of writing at least twice to those who gave toward your trip. Then, once you return, be sure to send a letter of thanks for giving you this privilege.

Many individuals have found the short-term experiences afforded them were the means God used to direct them for the future. The Lord Jesus took many followers on short-term trips before they became full-time servants. It is our prayer that these tips will help you prepare for the trip you are planning to take. If what we have suggested is helpful, please let us know. The purpose of this publication is to encourage those seeking God’s will for their lives.

Til next time,
Rev. Steve Fulks • sfulks@bmm.org
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click on opportunities at www.bmm.org or e-mail sfulks@bmm.org
Registration begins in September 2013

Arriba! Academic studies combined with real-life missionary experience in Peru.
The best way to prepare
Many details need to be cared for before making a trip, but the most important way you can prepare yourself is spiritually. Remember, the reason you are making the trip is to serve Christ. Prayer will be one of the most important means of preparation for your short-term experience. Pray that you will be teachable and eager to serve in any way required. Also ask the Lord to help you demonstrate love toward the people you will meet. Finally, plead for your own spiritual development and sensitivity to the Lord.

Communicate!
Communicate, communicate, communicate! Begin communicating with your missionary host as soon as your trip has been arranged. Express your enthusiasm for the opportunity and show willingness to do anything required. Mention any of your abilities that might be used on the field. Begin asking your host questions about specific assignments, dates, clothing needed, cultural norms, etc. The more you learn ahead of time, the less your culture shock will be.

Got the right insurance?
While most college students make summer mission trips without ever experiencing physical illness, you need to be prepared for this possibility. It is very important to find out if your current insurance will cover you while traveling abroad. Many, if not most, insurance policies do not. If you are not covered, a number of reasonably priced insurance policies provide major medical coverage and evacuation insurance during your time on the field. Baptist Mid-Missions will be happy to provide you with the names of companies offering such coverage. One of the best ways to avoid illness while on the mission field is to take the proper precautions. That begins by receiving the immunizations recommended for the country you will visit. While these may be obtained from your family doctor or some of the larger pharmacy chains, most are available at your local health department at a far-reduced cost. It is also wise to take along a water bottle with a good filtering system. Often, the change in water will be sufficient to give you, at the least, an upset stomach. Using a filtered water bottle often helps to lessen this effect.

Passports—now not later
Be certain to obtain a US passport well in advance of making your trip. You may apply for a passport at your nearest United States post office. If you are already the holder of a US passport, make certain that it will not expire during the time you will be on the mission field. If you prefer having someone else handle this paperwork, Travel Document Systems in Washington DC is a great resource. Visit their website at www.traveldocs.com.

A smart way to travel
Proper travel arrangements are a key ingredient in helping your trip go smoothly and be more enjoyable. Always work through a travel agent. A number of travel agencies work specifically with people making short-term trips, and Baptist Mid-Missions’ Church Relations Department can help you find this type of agency. But why work through a travel agent? First, they often have access to better prices than those found on the Internet. Some airlines offer discounts through travel agencies for these types of trips. Second, if your trip needs to be postponed or canceled, you have a far better chance to recoup your funds through a travel agency. Third, they are usually aware of any visa needs and can point you in the right direction in securing the proper applications.

Fundraising approach
As you well know, travel overseas costs money—sometimes, lots of money. Therefore, it is important to begin raising funds for your trip well in advance of your departure date. Help your donors understand they are not paying for your trip, but rather they are investing in your life. The way you present your trip will result in one or the other of these viewpoints. Begin by carefully crafting a letter that outlines your purpose and desire for making this trip. Let them know you are seeking God’s will for your life. The amount of money needed, the deadline for receiving funds, and where the money should be sent should all be clearly explained in your appeal letter. If you are working through a mission agency, be sure to let your donors know where they should send funds and how they can obtain tax-deductible receipts. Possible sources for funding your trip are your local church, your network of friends and family, fundraising activities, and your own personal earnings. Be certain to raise sufficient monies to help offset the expense you will create for your host (information on trip expenses are listed under each opportunity on BMM’s website). Be certain that funds for your room and board are sent to your host missionary prior to your travel.
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