

the Deacon's Bench

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PLAN YOUR NEXT MISSION TRIP

SIMPLIFY YOUR PREPARATION
BY FOLLOWING THESE SIX STEPS

In the topsy-turvy world of missions, a good planning process can help travelers respond to adversity and see their work through—even when they get thrown for a loop.

Riding through busy Sarajevo traffic, a mission team from a church in suburban Atlanta was on its way to distribute Scripture. Suddenly, another vehicle cut in front of the team's van. When the driver swerved to avoid a collision, he hit the curb, sending the top-heavy vehicle into a rollover.

Thousands of miles from home and bewildered by the wreck, the team members gingerly climbed out of the van and checked for injuries. Miraculously, everyone walked away with only bruises.

"We typically start planning for a trip eight months before the trip starts," says the church's director of missions. "We'll have six to eight meetings during that time, and one of those meetings is dedicated to personal safety."

Following a good process can help your mission teams avoid dangerous situations and respond efficiently when things turn dicey. Here are six steps to help you plan your next trip:

1. Work with an embedded host. A trusted mission partner can help guide the team at every step—advising travelers on what to pack, organizing activities that will benefit the ministry, supervising the team, and continuing to minister after the team leaves. When looking for a host, start with mission-sending organizations and long-term missionaries your ministry supports.

2. Recruit qualified trip leaders and medical personnel. A good trip leader will work with the missionary host to shepherd the team through the trip. It's also a good idea to bring someone with medical training, in case someone needs first aid while in a remote location.

3. Designate an emergency contact. Have one contact person—and perhaps a backup—at home to relay information to travelers' families in case of emergency. Designating a single contact can save time and help travelers focus on the situation in the field.

4. Create a master document folder. If your travelers hit a bump in the road, the right paperwork can help them get back on track. Create a master folder that contains a signed activity participation agreement for each traveler;

Mission travel coverage can protect your people and your ministry during mission trips.

photocopies of each team member's health insurance card, passport, and visas; passport-sized photos of each traveler; contact information for the nearest American embassy or consulate and local police; airline itinerary listing travelers' names; and insurance company contact information. Be sure to keep the folder in a secure place, protecting your team members' personal information.

5. Prepare your team. Everyone going on the trip should complete an application verifying good health, needed vaccinations, parental approval (for minors), and adequate insurance. It's a good idea to host a series of team meetings to inform travelers about the documents (such as passports and visas) they'll need, the work they'll do, the items to pack, and the culture they'll encounter. Be sure everyone knows how to avoid dangerous places and situations.

6. Arrange insurance coverage. Usually, U.S. health insurance policies don't cover foreign activities, so even a visit to a foreign hospital can become a big expense, fast. Brotherhood Mutual offers insurance for many situations short-term missionaries can encounter, from losing luggage to a medical emergency. We offer comprehensive coverage for full-time missionaries and foreign mission operations, too.

To learn more about mission travel insurance, and to download our *Short-Term Mission Trip Checklist*, visit www.BrotherhoodMutual.com/Mission-Travel. 📄



SAFEGUARD YOUR VALUABLES

TRAVEL SAFELY WITH MONEY AND DOCUMENTS



Protecting valuables is critical for mission travelers, and there are plenty of ways for team members to safeguard the items they need for returning home. Consider the following suggestions to help secure money, passports, identification, and more:

- **Leave copies at home.** If something happens to important documents, like proof of insurance, a friend or relative back home can fax or email a backup copy.
- **Notify credit card issuers of your travel plans.** Banks and credit card companies may get suspicious of overseas purchases and suspend your account. If you're traveling out of the country, tell credit card companies ahead of time. Share the dates and places you'll visit, and give them a way to contact you if they suspect fraud.
- **Know your surroundings.** Some places are safer than others. Ask your local host or team leader if there are areas you should avoid.
- **Keep valuables close.** A money belt worn under clothes is generally a safer option than a backpack or purse. While a bag can be forgotten (or quickly stolen by a passerby), a money belt is strapped to the body, under clothes and out of plain view. This is the best place to keep your passport, as well. Always avoid leaving bags, purses, and mobile devices unattended.
- **Use multiple hiding places.** When all valuables are hidden in one place, one incident can take them all away. Diversify with a series of discreet hiding places.
- **Report lost and stolen items immediately.** If a theft or loss occurs, report it to local police, your insurer, and credit card companies as soon as possible. Getting a quick start to the recovery process may help to limit the damage a thief does.

By taking proactive steps to protect yourself and your valuables, you may be able to avoid theft and stay safe during your travels.

AFTER THE TRIP: LEARNING BY REFLECTING



Your mission team made all the right preparations. The team had a productive, meaningful journey and returned home with no major incidents. At first glance, it may seem like you've completed a perfect trip. But there's more you can do to help your travelers process what they've seen and heard.

In his role as the associate director of missional formation at Abilene Christian University, Dr. Gary Green has sent hundreds of students on mission trips. He finds that following up with travelers after their trips is a critical step in the mission process. A trip leader or pastor can lead the conversations.

"Usually, there's very little follow-up after a trip," Green says. But according to a Harvard study, taking time to reflect on an experience helps to boost learning.

By hosting post-trip debriefing meetings, you can help travelers take three steps: cope with any issues they may have encountered during the trip, grow from their experiences, and move toward future ministry opportunities.

Coping

"The vast majority of people will have positive experiences in their travels," Green says. "They just need to meet with a group of peers to share their stories and process things."

For some, though, traveling to a developing country can be stressful. This stress can bring pre-existing emotional issues to the surface. Or, travelers may encounter traumatic situations that they don't normally experience in the United States. If mission team members mention that they're struggling with these issues, you may want to refer them to counselors for further help.

Learning and Growth

Mission trips can spur tremendous spiritual growth. To help travelers maximize their growth, Green recommends your travelers consider questions such as:

- How do you see yourself differently as a result of your trip?
- How do you see God differently as a result of your trip?
- How do you see other people differently as a result of your trip?
- What lessons can you learn and how can you grow from this trip?

Team leaders may want to supply travelers with the questions prior to the debriefing meeting. In doing so, participants can think about their answers privately before sharing with the group.

Charting a Course

According to Green, returning travelers commonly ask: "Now what?" Many team members want to continue ministering, but they aren't sure how to proceed. Mission team leaders, pastors, and other ministry leaders may help guide travelers on a path that fits.

"Some people decide they want to become long-term missionaries," Green says. "We also have people who use their experiences in other ways." For example, he says, they might help their home church revamp their mission efforts.

Green has written a book about maximizing the benefit of short-term mission trips, *Now What?: Spiritual Discernment for Cultural Encounters*. To learn more about post-trip debriefing, visit his website, DrGaryGreen.org. 📖



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'SERVICE IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP'

GARD USES HIS MISSION EXPERIENCE TO HELP MINISTRIES

Derek Gard describes his first short-term mission trip as “a nightmare” and “a complete disaster.” Bedridden by illness for the final three days in Mexico City, he vowed never to return to the field. Little did he know that the joy of serving others would drive him to become a full-time missionary.

“I made another short-term trip—reluctantly—the following year. After that trip, I couldn’t wait to go back,” Gard says. “A few years later, I realized I was supposed to move to the mission field.”

He and his family served full-time in the Dominican Republic for three years, hosting more than 100 mission teams each year. Gard connected teams with tasks, transportation, and local pastors.

Now at Brotherhood Mutual, Gard helps to protect people and ministries as they head onto the field for their own mission work.

Q: Why is mission work such a passion for you?

DG: A friend of mine summed it up perfectly when he said, “service is an act of worship.” For the entire trip, everything you do is worshipping God through an act of service. As a long-term missionary, that made me a sort of worship leader. My job was to provide an atmosphere for travelers to worship in a way that was joyful and a great experience. I saw people go on mission trips and have their lives changed.

Q: Do you still feel a connection to the Dominican Republic?

DG: Absolutely! My kids still talk to people they met there. The internet and videoconferencing help us stay connected.



Derek Gard and his wife, Lydia, served in the Dominican Republic for three years.

Q: What kind of “wow” stories can you share?

DG: Here’s one from before I was a full-time missionary: The first time I ever led a team on a short-term trip for my church, we went to the Dominican Republic. One of our team members was an audiologist who wanted to fit people with custom hearing aids. She had all the equipment and was ready to go. So we fitted dozens of people with these hearing aids. We got to see the look on a young boy’s face when he heard for the first time. It was so powerful. Years later, his pastor told us that the boy was a completely different person from the one who walked into the clinic that day. It completely changed how he viewed himself.

Q: Is there any wisdom you’d pass along to people preparing for a mission trip?

DG: I would tell travelers not to let strategy take them away from how the Holy Spirit is moving them to serve. We have to be good stewards, and we can’t be reckless, but sometimes, we over-strategize to the point where we let our plans get in the way of the Holy Spirit.

Here’s an example: We were hosting an outdoor basketball clinic in the Dominican Republic. It started pouring down rain. Nobody wanted to play in the rain. The clinic had to end early, so I got mad and walked back to our church. I sat there and sulked for a while. About two hours later, some of our short-term helpers walked into the church with a few Dominican kids, all of them soaking wet, cackling, and laughing. They had stayed and played basketball in the rain and had a great time. Immediately, I realized I’d missed the point. I was so focused on my plans and what I wanted to do that I missed an opportunity to care for these people and be in a relationship with them. We can’t out-strategize God.



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the Deacon's Bench

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TRIP PLANNING

These six steps can help you prepare.

PASSPORT PROTECTION

Learn how to secure valuables and documents.

NOW WHAT?

Reflection can spur growth in travelers.

AN ACT OF WORSHIP

Gard continues serving mission teams.

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