

“But, what will I be doing?”

This is usually the first question we get asked by potential short-term mission participants. It is very normal for people to approach short-term mission (STM) trips with a “go and do” mindset, rather than a “be and learn” one. As part of our focus on Global Discipleship, we design STM trips that strike a balance between doing and learning. The result? A life-changing experience that will stay with you forever when approached with the right attitude.

Whether you are going to teach, lead a Vacation Bible School or help in a construction project, STM team members all contribute to the dynamics of the group. Each member needs to consider how God has uniquely gifted them and how those gifts can be used to serve the team and the community.

Most STM trips involve a cross-cultural experience where sights, sounds, smells, climate, and customs vary greatly from our own. For some locations, travel can be an arduous task. Rural locations may have limited internet access and present a unique set of challenges that can stretch some people beyond their usual comfort zone. STMers need to be willing to sacrifice their grasp on the familiar and expect the unexpected.

It’s important that STM teams defer to leadership, whether it’s the actual team leader or the CBM Field Staff facilitating the trip. While opinions may vary at times, unity, peace and trust in the trip leaders are key to ensuring the overall goals and experience of STMs are achieved and everyone has the best possible experience. Most importantly, keep praying together and be open to what God has in store for you!

10 WAYS TO HAVE AN AMAZING SHORT TERM MISSION EXPERIENCE!

A short-term mission (STM) can be a transformational, life-altering experience. It can be scary, challenging, exciting, adventurous and absolutely instrumental in your discipleship journey, so it’s very important that you approach it with the best possible mindset and expectations.

To maximize your STM experience, take to heart the following advice:

1. **Embrace opportunities for simple acts of service.** We want to win people to Christ, yet if we focus only on the lofty goal of winning souls, we can miss the joy and spiritual richness we receive when we serve one another – pick up a trowel, load a truck, feed a hungry person some lunch. Remember, Christ Himself washed the feet of His disciples – our own Lord and Saviour was setting an example of a pure servant’s heart.

2. **Set aside time for prayer, reflection and study.** An STM can be overwhelming, and you'll feel like you're on the go from dawn to dusk. Make sure you take some time amidst the busyness to process what you are experiencing, and share this one-on-one with God – He wants to hear how you're doing!
3. **Embrace flexibility!** In many parts of the world and in our own country, cultures value relationships above the clock. Don't be surprised if the carefully prepared itinerary you received before departure changes once you arrive on site; often a project will be set aside in order to develop the relationship between those whom you have gone to serve and you – welcome this opportunity!
4. **Be an encouragement to those in the field.** Most people enthusiastically research and plan extensively before they leave on an STM, and then are surprised to find their experience may not match what they thought they knew. Remember you are there to experience and to learn – ask lots of questions, and remember to pray with and for those whom you are serving.
5. **Focus on your relationship with God.** An STM can be an intense time, and you may feel drawn to others on your team or in the field. Remember that one of the goals of your STM is to deepen your relationship with God, not with other singles on your team – try to put those attractions behind you and focus on the real prize.
6. **Immerse yourself in the experience!** An STM is a great and safe way to test and stretch yourself – try things you wouldn't normally do, and learn some of the local language. English is not as widely spoken as you may think, and learning a few key phrases in a foreign language can quickly endear you to the people you meet.
7. **Be supportive and encouraging within your team.** A good team member lifts up at all times, even when it may be difficult. Be a sympathetic ear, an encouraging voice, an obedient and enthusiastic servant – help set the bar high for exhortation, compassion and kindness.
8. **Be bold!** Many local customs and dishes may seem strange to you, but participate enthusiastically when invited – you'll regret more what you didn't try than what you did!
9. **Share the burden.** We are not all equally blessed – some have gifting that others do not have, so remember to share with others in need, and ask humbly when you yourself find yourself less equipped.
10. **Remember your home church is part of the team.** You may be the one in the field, but your home church believed in God's call enough to help send you there and to pray for you, your ministry and your health. Reciprocate by praying equally for blessings upon them, and share your experiences with them when you return home with a view to inspire and encourage others to support the STM experience and the work you have participated in while away.