

things to know before you go

What should I be looking for in a mission agency?

Do you share their vision? Take a look at their mission statement. Maybe they have a particular theological bias which you may struggle with. Take time to look into it. Can you be sure you'll be looked after while you are serving with this agency? Look at the article on the '**Code of Best Practice**' (page 12). Many agencies have adopted this code and it has influenced their practices on a number of levels. This will help you ask the right questions of mission agencies and give you the assurances you need in choosing the right one.

Is it better to go on a trip organised by my church or one run by a mission agency?

If your local church already has links with a particular mission project, then the church will undoubtedly benefit from strengthening those links through the visit of a team. This could also become a reciprocal thing, where church exchanges take place. Having said this, mission agencies have expertise that is often not readily accessible in a local church situation. Those who have earned a reputation for running short term programmes successfully will inevitably give you an added sense of security in choosing to serve with them. There are a number of agencies which are willing to take a group from one church to a particular situation, so it may be worth seeking a partnership. This may enable your church to fulfill its own aims whilst having access to good advice and expertise. Whatever you do, make sure that your church leadership is involved in your own decision-making process.



What can I realistically achieve on a short term trip?

If you're having visions of standing before thousands of people to preach the gospel and leading hundreds to a first time commitment, then your expectations may be a tad unrealistic. This may happen, but it's not the norm. UK-based projects may lend themselves to direct evangelism more readily, and if God uses you to lead someone to Christ, then we can only praise him for the privilege. Cross-culturally, it's less straightforward. Steve Collins, writing for 'shorttermmissions.com' comments, *"Be realistic about the depth of evangelism you will be able to do in the particular cross-cultural setting you are involved in. Many people expect that their cross-cultural efforts during a 2-week period will result in conversions for Christ. Realistically, a group of high school students working cross-culturally without foreign language skills probably will not see many people accept Christ personally. This should not diminish the impact their participation will have in a process that brings those individuals to receive Christ as Lord."* I think the key words here are 'be realistic', but not to the exclusion of 'be expectant'. God may well have something unexpected up his sleeve, and we should never exclude the possibility of the miraculous!

I don't really feel I have anything to offer but I still want to do something and go somewhere...'

Short-termers often comment that they gain more from their experiences than they've been able to give. The majority of people who go on short term projects do so without a particular skill.

Depending on the nature of the project, some agencies will offer some training, either before the project or on-the-job. Steve Collins notes, *"Don't feel like you have to be a gifted carpenter to work on a construction project. You will be amazed at what novices can do when you add the right amount of on-site coaching and the motivation to serve the Lord. Most mission agencies are happy to have anyone who has a servant heart. Oftentimes, just your presence on the project brings the intangibles such as encouragement and support to the folks you work with."* On the other hand, you may have a particular skill that will enable you to contribute something to a project. If this is the case, then find a project that will allow you to use that skill. The more you feel that you made a significant contribution, the more you will be motivated to participate on another project in the future!

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What if my family don't what me to do this?

First, you need to establish what is behind their objections. It is perfectly natural for a parent to be concerned about their offspring taking off somewhere for a year. If members of your family are not Christians then you need to be sensitive in how you handle the situation. If this is the case then they may never agree with any Christian activity you engage in. If their concern is for your protection and safety, then do what you can to address their concerns. Get the agency you'll be serving with to talk to them and give them every possible reassurance. Involve your church leader if necessary. Talking to others who have had similar concerns may also help them. If at the end of this they still object, then you need to ask yourself questions about what's most important. If God clearly has placed his call on your life for Christian service then you may need to just go for it. Maybe they'll come round to the idea in time. However, scripture commands us to obey our parents and respect our families, and you should do what you can to protect your relationship with them. Whether you're a student with concerned parents or a retiree with concerned children, the issues are the same. Seek advice from people you respect - they may help you find a way through the difficulty. It's also worth saying that the world is a much smaller place now and the prospect of travelling thousands of miles to serve on an overseas project isn't as scary as it used to be.

How do I go about raising funds?

A good place to start is by telling people about your plans. If you don't talk about it then others may miss out on the opportunity to bless you. Think creatively about sponsored events. It's a great way to get your friends involved. Wherever possible, your church should be involved in your plans and there may be funds available to help you. And don't forget to pray. Amazingly, this is often the last thing people do. In my past experience of sending teams off to Africa, I have been amazed to see how the funds come in for team members. God stuns me every time! Largely, it's because they've prayed and had others praying with them. We have a great provider and should never underestimate his generosity.



How will this trip fit into the rest of my life?

I'd be lying to you if I said that involvement in mission didn't have the potential to be life-changing. Many people go on these trips expecting to make an impact and are surprised to discover that they have been impacted personally to a much larger extent. So, be prepared to be changed. It may be that God will use your experience to lead you in a new direction, but it may be just as possible that it will confirm to you that you're exactly where God wants you to be for now. Most agencies run debriefing programmes which are set up to help you process the experiences you've had and to offer practical advice on making the most of it once you've come home. I have observed that many people who have been impacted by a short term mission experience become mission mobilisers in their churches or CUs. Likewise, many of those who become enthusiastic communicators move on a stage further to become team leaders for projects with the agency with which they had their first experience. Others will seek further training to prepare for longer term service. Who knows where it all might lead? At the very least, be open to what God wants to teach you.

Why not order a copy of the **short-term workbook**. It contains lots of helpful reflection, information and suggestions to help you prepare for a short-term trip. Only £2.50

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Where do I go from here?

Take a good look through this publication. Read about the agencies and their opportunities. Engage with the testimonies of those who have been there and done that. Browse the website, ask questions, talk to others who have been. Investigate it thoroughly. If you still have questions after all this, or just need some objective input into your decision making process, then contact us at Christian Vocations. We're available all year round to help you find the opportunity that's right for you.