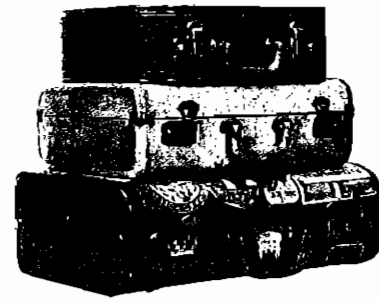


7 TIPS For a Positive Short-Term Missions Experience!

by Brook Ford



Most full-time missionaries are glad to host short-term missionaries, as a couple or a single or even a team. Short-term missions trips can range in length from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, or sometimes longer depending on the need on the field and availability of the short-termer. Short-termers can bring energy and vitality to a missionary's ministry, and they can be a great encouragement to those who have been in the trenches for years on end. However, an ill-equipped short-termer can have the opposite effect and instead of being a blessing can be a drain on already stretched resources. If you are considering a short-term missions trip, here are a few tips to help you have the most positive impact possible on both the country you are visiting and the full-time missionary you want to help.

1 Communicate clearly with your Heavenly Father. The old adage, "Some were sent and some just went," also applies to short-term missions. Prayerfully seek God's perfect will to make sure it is His idea that you go on a particular missions trip—and that it is not just an excuse for an exotic vacation, or because you have nothing better to do.

2 Communicate clearly—and courteously, with the missionary you hope to visit. Write or e-mail the missionaries on the field well in advance of a potential visit. Be clear about any particular burden God has laid on you as well as when and how long you will be available for a visit. Depending on the burden and the Lord's leading it may be wise to approach more than one missionary. However, it is important to be flexible and patient. After you have stated your interest, please wait for the full-time missionary to invite you to come.

After an invitation has been issued, further communication should include questions about necessary shots, visas, medicines, and culture. What kind of dress is appropriate/not appropriate? Are there taboos to be avoided? It may seem funny to the Western mindset that showing the sole of your foot is highly offensive, but it is important to trust the missionary's guidance. He or she will continue living there long after you have departed. Make a note of all information, pack appropriate clothing and follow the guidelines given.

3 Count the cost. This tip is not so much about the cost of your journey (airfare, etc.) as it is about counting the expense your visit incurs to the missionary on the field. Many things we consider to be "necessities" quickly become luxuries in a third-world environment. Even things like water and electricity cannot be taken for granted. One should also remember that gas or diesel is generally twice as expensive as in the U.S., so even "quick trips" add up fast. Oftentimes local foods are not too expensive, but any "special" foods can be very costly. In most cases the missionary you visit would never ask you to cover the cost of your stay. However, if he or she does, please know that the amount has been carefully considered, and is most likely below what your visit actually costs. In any event, it would be a great help and a blessing to the missionary if a gift were made to defray extra expenses incurred on your behalf.

4 Don't just give of yourself—give of your luggage! Most international flights still allow two 50-pound pieces of luggage per person. Be prepared to devote at least half your luggage allowance to ministry needs and treats for the missionary you are visiting. It is amazing how special even a bag of chocolate chips can be in an area where they are not available.

5 Be a happy camper! It is called "culture shock" for a reason—it is a shock to your system. The time difference, the way things are done, the pace of life, the heat (or cold), perhaps not having a sit-down toilet, having to sleep with a mosquito net; all of these things together can make one grumpy. It is important to make an effort to meet each of these new experiences with the best outlook possible. A helpful, cheerful attitude will work wonders in even the most difficult situations.

6 Keep a record. Keep a journal of your short-term ministry. Impressions which you think you'll never forget may start to fade on the flight home. Did you accomplish your goals? Did you make new friends? What kind of impact was made on *you*? Note special prayer requests and needs you can share with others. Also be sure to take lots of photographs—as long as it doesn't interfere with cultural norms. [However, be aware that in some countries it is not advisable to take pictures at airports or of local military or police.]

7 Be a prayer warrior. Pray before the trip, for God's blessing on the country, its people, all missionaries and church workers serving there, for the work you hope to accomplish. Pray during your stay, for God's strength and enabling to complete the task He gave you. Pray afterwards for all the needs God showed you, both spiritual and practical, and that God will bless and bring to fruition the seeds sown during your visit.



Brook Ford was commended by North Ridge Bible Chapel in Raleigh, NC to the work of the Lord in Kigoma, Tanzania in 2005.