

# Should churches go on short-term mission trips?

This question might seem surprising, but it's a hot-button issue in many circles. The discussion accelerated several years ago with the publication of the book, *When Helping Hurts*. Other studies have followed, but the core question remains: do short-term mission trips and traditional non-profit projects actually help the people they want to help?

## What kind of trips and projects are we talking about?

- Trips sponsored by churches, denominations, or non-profit groups
- Lasting from a few days up to several weeks (anything over a semester usually isn't considered short-term)
- Sometimes only an individual goes, but usually a group is involved, from just a few people up to several dozen people
- Various projects/purposes - evangelism, construction/repair, food/water, VBS/camps, education, cross-cultural experiences, etc.

## So...why *not* go on or support short-term trips? (*The Cons*)

- **Money** - "Why would we spend money to travel to another location? Why not just send the money to the missionaries?"
- **Seemingly Unimportant Projects** - "We are going to paint houses and lead a sports camp. Aren't there people in that location who can do that?"
- **Forced or False Results** - Feeling pressure to report a certain number of salvations or attendance metrics to justify the trip.
- **Undercover Vacation** - "Why would I give money to help someone else go on a vacation?"
- **Hinder the Missionaries or Local Churches/Residents** - Probably the biggest caution for short-term mission trips is that too many of these trips end up either being a drain on the missionaries or actually hurt their work (or the local believers) in some way. This negative impact can show up in several forms, but often includes poor cultural awareness, selfish team members, or prideful belief that "we" (the Americans) know more than "them" (the local believers or missionaries on the ground).

## So...why go on or support short-term trips? (*The Pros*)

- **Encourage the Missionaries** - At their very best, short-term mission trips can refresh and encourage the missionaries who are serving full-time in these hard ministry locations. A key success marker for short-term trips is how the missionaries feel when the group leaves.
- **Build Up the Church** - Short-term mission trips can add fuel to local churches. These churches are inspired by people who travel to be with them, and they are reminded of the global Body of Christ. Plus, it's powerful for mission teams and local believers to worship, pray, serve, and play together.
- **Fresh Perspective** - Traveling to a new location can cause us to see our homes, work, church, and other people in fresh ways.
- **Impact How You Live at Home** - When we interact with missionaries and gain a fresh perspective, we often live differently in everyday life. Learning to share the Gospel on a mission trip often leads us to do the same when we return home.
- **Break Down Walls** - If we're not careful, we can all develop prejudices about other ethnicities or nationalities. Mission trips can break down walls and remind us of our unity in Christ and the value of all people.
- **Sanctification and Discipleship** - Mission trips can accelerate a person's spiritual growth. The process of planning, traveling, ministering, and debriefing can lead to significant spiritual growth. Plus, mission trips often reveal sins and weaknesses in our character that need attention when we return home.
- **Catalyst for Long-Term Missions** - Almost all career and long-term missionaries got their start by going on short-term mission trips.
- **Advance the Gospel** - Even when our plans are imperfect, God works in powerful ways when His people go out in faith and share the Good News of Jesus. Short-term mission trips can advance the Gospel!

## So...

- **Pray**
- **Give**
- **Get Your Passport**
- **Find a Trip**
- **Go! Across the street. Around the world.**