

TRAVELING INTERNATIONALLY

If your mission experience or pilgrimage takes you to another country, you will need to be sure you check—in with the U.S. Department of State on travel requirements, including visas. A travel agent can help you with this criteria. Here's the link:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english.html>.

Even if your destination does not require a visa or additional documentation, you should still visit the Department of State website and register your group so that the local embassy has a record of your group's visit. Access the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) here: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Check to make sure every traveler's passport is current and not expiring within 6 months of travel. Some countries require that a traveler's passport be valid for at least six months beyond the dates of the trip. Contact the embassy of your foreign destination for more information. That source for finding these is here:

<http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.html>.

You will also need to have individual travel letters for each individual under 18 years of age. The sample travel letter is on the next page. This letter must be signed by all parents/guardians and notarized. Keep this letter with you as you check—in for flights and

navigate customs and immigration. A sample International Travel Letter is included in this Manual.

As you prepare to travel, make sure you have the contact information for the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate where you are going. Consular duty personnel are available for emergency assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas and in Washington, D.C. Contact information for U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas may be found here:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country.html>.

In case of emergency, families can contact the Office of Overseas Citizens Services in Washington, D.C. at 1.888.407.4747 (during business hours) or 202.647.5225 (after hours). The State Department will relay the message to the consular officers in the country where you are. The consular officers will then try to locate you, pass on any urgent messages, and, if you wish, report back to your family in accordance with the Privacy Act. Be sure to include this information on any itinerary you distribute to families before you leave.

Vaccinations Are Required for Entry to Some Countries

Some countries require foreign visitors to carry an International Certificate of Vaccination (aka Yellow Card) or other proof that they have had certain inoculations or medical tests before entering or transiting their country. Before you travel, check the Country Specific Information available here: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country.html> or contact the foreign embassy of the country to be visited for current entry requirements.

Health Experts Recommend Vaccinations for Travel to Some Countries

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) can provide you with their recommendations for vaccinations and other travel health precautions for your trip abroad.

Getting Medical Help Abroad

If you are traveling internationally, you may want to recruit a medical professional to travel with you. If that is not possible, you can find a doctor or health professional abroad using this link:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/health/doctors.html>.

Make sure each traveler's medical insurance covers them internationally. Although some health insurance companies will pay "customary and reasonable" hospital

costs abroad, very few will pay for a medical evacuation back to the U.S., which can easily cost over \$10,000, depending on your condition and location. Travelers may be required to pay for care when they receive it, regardless of insurance coverage. If a traveler does not have an insurance policy to cover them while abroad, consider working with them to purchase a short-term policy that does. Many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas, including emergency services such as medical evacuations.

TRAVELING INTERNATIONALLY

sample consent letter

DATE

To Whom it May Concern:

I, [LEGAL AND CUSTODIAL PARENTS NAMES], authorize my child, [TRAVELER'S NAME], to travel to [DESTINATION] on [DATES] with [ORGANIZATION NAME].

Signature #1

PARENT/GUARDIAN#1 NAME

RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD

PARENT/GUARDIAN ADDRESS

PARENT/GUARDIAN PHONE NUMBER

Signature #2

PARENT/GUARDIAN#2 NAME

RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD

PARENT/GUARDIAN ADDRESS

PARENT/GUARDIAN PHONE NUMBER

LOGISTICS

So you probably didn't know that youth leadership involved being an expert in making travel arrangements for large groups. Fear not! There are a number of resources aimed at helping you handle logistics.

If you can, make a site visit before you travel. This is the best way to both gather information and do a practice run through all logistics. See the section titled *The Value of a Site Visit* for more details.

Your logistical planning will need to include the following:

How to Get There

If you want to tackle this aspect of your mission experience or pilgrimage yourself, break down each step of your journey and make lists of what logistics are involved. For example, if you will be serving in Juneau, Alaska, do your online research on airfares and routes, determine what combination of fare and schedule fit your needs, and contact the airline directly for a group rate. In general, airlines consider a group to be 15 or more individuals. They will usually allow a +/- of 10% of the group number (meaning that if you reserve 20, you can drop or add 2 spaces depending). They are also fairly flexible about attaching names to numbers, often not requiring these details more than a month or two beforehand for domestic flights.

Next, determine what transportation you need from the airport to your destination. Can you rent cars or vans? Do you need to catch the train? Never be afraid to contact providers directly. They are there to serve you and can be extraordinarily helpful in planning your trip.

Where to Stay

Where will you be staying? Options can include everything from on-site accommodations to local colleges that make dorms available for rent in the summer. Hostels and guest houses can be good options for affordable housing. Also, local Episcopal churches are sometimes amenable to the idea of putting up a group for a night or two. Be aware that churches don't often have showers, so know the personality of your group and make plans accordingly. In Alaska, and other locations, the local gym or hotel often offer pay showers – open to the public for \$2–3/shower. This is where that call to the diocesan office can help in terms of locating housing and bathing options.

Where to Eat

Finally, determine how you will be taking your meals. Will kitchens be available? Or will you need to eat in cafeterias or restaurants?

Including the Host Community

In building authentic relationships, be mindful of any disparity between those involved. Though total equity may not be a realistic goal, sharing common experiences should be integrated into the experience. These should

include possibly sharing meals, lodging, and recreational activities, all of which add to the logistical planning and total cost for the experience.

Sound like too much to undertake?

As part of the Episcopal Church, we are well connected around the world. Contact the Episcopal Diocese of the area you plan to travel to for assistance. If possible, arrange a Site Visit to begin the relationship building and gain a better understanding of the mission and culture. See *The Value of a Site Visit* in the Appendix.

Travel agents can be helpful with many of these logistics – especially the airfare, ground transport, and housing. Establishing a relationship with a travel agency can also be extremely helpful if problems occur while away, such as having to rebook flights or to assist with lost luggage.

There are many organizations that deal specifically with youth mission trips and pilgrimages. (Many of these who will serve as your travel agent, making most of your mission site plans. This is unclear.) As noted earlier, most of these organizations do not share our Episcopal tradition and theological viewpoints. Many offer only the logistics of the work aspect of the mission trip with no processing or worship incorporated.

Of course, all of these logistical considerations lead into building a budget and fundraising plan, which is covered in the following section.

THE VALUE *of* SITE VISITS

Visiting your mission experience or pilgrimage site can help you understand so much about the community you are visiting, the needs of the people, and the cultural context of the site. It can also help you begin to establish a relationship with the people with whom you will be in mission.

There are really two aspects to the site: getting a handle on the logistics and making a personal connection with your host.

Logistics

In terms of logistics, making a site visit can give you the opportunity to make a run—through of your upcoming travel. Note any transportation specifics and where you might take meals along the way. Put yourself in the place of your young missionaries and consider what might stand out to them.

When you reach the mission or pilgrimage site, make note of sleeping arrangements, bathing areas, open spaces for recreation, meetings space, and any known tasks for your group. Keep your Safe Church training in mind in terms of how you will need to negotiate the space to stay in accord with the Safeguarding God's Children requirements.

A list of the site characteristics you might find helpful is here:

<http://inspiringmission.com/submit-site/>.

As you tour the site, ask questions. If you require accommodations outside what is readily available, ask your host for advice on how to meet that need.

Personal Connection

Be sure to plan enough time to develop a connection with the individuals you will be serving with, especially the leadership team at the site. Listen to their stories and talk through any needs, desires, hopes, or expectations they have for this visit.

Ask questions about cultural—specific opportunities and learn as much as you can about the context of your upcoming experience. Be the eyes and ears of your Mission Team as you explore this site.

As you depart, commit to praying for each other during the interim between the site visit and the experience. If possible, get a list and/or a photograph or video of the people in their community and give them a list and/or pictures from yours.

If you have time, visit the local Episcopal Church diocesan office and meet the staff and bishop (if possible). Making this connection can be invaluable down the road as you continue to plan your mission experience or pilgrimage.