



VISTACHURCH

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH GOD

**Short-Term
Mission Trip
Participant
Handbook**

Vista Community Church Mission Strategy

Our church has a two-fold missions strategy: global discipleship and mobilization.

- Global discipleship includes our efforts to join God in His mission to all people, especially in our target groups.
- Mobilization includes our efforts to engage our membership in missions through prayer, giving, and going.

Purpose of Short-Term Mission Projects

- to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ
- to impact the world through the living testimonies of project participants and through the Word of God
- to aid and build up the ministry of the local church, pastor, or missionary
- to encourage and minister to the missionaries with whom we partner
- to assist Vista in being obedient to God's command expressed in the Great Commission
- to assist in the development of long-term, strategic partnerships throughout the world

Policies for Team Behavior and Attitude

Team members participant on Vista Church-sponsored short-term trips are reminded that they are ambassadors of Jesus Christ. As teams go overseas, they not only represent Him, but Vista Church and the supporting mission agency, if applicable. This is a tremendous responsibility.

For this reason, the Global Missions Team asks that each team member seek to be above reproach in his/her actions and attitudes. *Willfully ignoring these norms could result in being asked to leave early.*

- Honor Jesus Christ in your thoughts, actions, speech, and dress
- Refrain from any actions prohibited in God's Word
- Team members must submit to the Team Leader's authority.
- Due to the political instability and anti-American sentiment in various countries around the world, team members should refrain from expressing political opinions while overseas.
- Read and follow the Security Guidelines printed in this packet.
- No consumption of alcoholic beverages or any use of tobacco or illegal drugs while on the trip.
- No gambling or viewing of any pornographic material.
- No romantic displays of affection or engaging in romantic relationships amongst non-married team members.
- The team member must adhere to the behavioral guidelines set by the team leadership with a mind toward the destination's culture. This will require a servant attitude toward all nationals and team members, as well as a willingness to learn from the host culture.

Policies for Short-Team Members

Team Member Selection

- All team members must have a testimony of salvation through Jesus Christ and be able to verbally express this testimony before the team leaves. (Exceptions to this will be handled on a case-by-case basis.)
- On all adult short-term mission trips, team members should be at least 18 years of age unless otherwise approved by the Team Leader(s). Those under 18 years can still go on some trips if they have a notarized Power of Attorney Form and the Trip Leader agrees. Parental or guardian permission is legally required for team members under 18 years of age.
- Team members must complete the Vista Missions Trip Application through the Managed Missions website.
- Selection may require interviews with potential team members and the Team Leader.
- Short-term members must agree to and comply with the Financial Guidelines presented below.

Financial Guidelines

- Team members are expected to raise the predetermined financial support for their trip.
- Funding should be 100% completed 3 weeks before the departure date.
- All team member financial support shall be channeled through Vista, and if any team member raises more than the required support, all available funds will be reallocated within the team account for said trip.
- If a team member cannot participate on their trip, their funds cannot be refunded. Their funds can be reallocated within the team account for said trip and/or deposited in the Short Term Missions account for future use. If a team member cannot participate on their trip due to an unexpected emergency, their funds may be held for 1 year to be used on a future Vista Church missions trip.
- Team members should make funding deposits through the financial office of Vista Church. The financial office will keep the official record of the all short-term missions giving. Managed Missions will be used to track individual members' support raising.
- Team members should keep a "Donation Receipt Book" when turning in any funds for their mission trip or when they have been notified of a gift provide online through the Vista website. This booklet will help all participants in reviewing the giving as recorded on Managed Missions. Any discrepancies should be reported to the Managed Missions processing team via email. This will assist the Managed Missions processing team in tracking funds. Managed Missions will also reconcile their records with the Vista financial office.

Deposits and Deadlines

- Each international short-term mission trip will require a non-refundable deposit. This deposit will be used to secure airline space for each team member. This deposit is part of the total trip cost, and it may be more for certain trips due to airline ticket costs.
- Half of each team member's total trip payment will be due 90 days prior to departure. This money will be used to pay for airline tickets and will be non-refundable.
- Full trip payment will be due 3 weeks prior to departure. This money will be used to pay for field costs (lodging, food, transportation, medical insurance, materials, supplies, etc.) and will be non-refundable.
- If a team member knows that he/she will be unable to raise the full amount needed, they need to schedule a meeting with their Team Leader and the Mission Director.

Reimbursement Requests

- If a team member raises more funds than is required, then a request may be submitted to cover expenses for passport, visa, immunizations, support letters, and stamps. The request cannot exceed the excess amount raised. All remaining excess funds can be used to cover other team members who have not raised the full amount of the trip cost.

Refunds

- If you have paid for your trip with your own funds prior to the deadlines, then you may be eligible for a full refund, minus the deposit. Once the deadlines have passed, there will be no refunds if airline tickets or money has been disbursed.
- If you have paid for your trip with sponsor money or donations, then you will not be eligible for a refund. In this case, your trip money will be reallocated to the team.

Giving Information

All contributions to Vista Church's missions are non-refundable. IRS regulations prohibit the church finance office from giving donors tax credit for donations designated for individuals. Donations can be preferenced for individuals with the understanding that all solicited contributions are under the complete discretion and control of Vista Church.

For a donation to be tax deductible, the following must be done:

- Checks and money orders should be made payable to "Vista Church." An individual's name may only be included in the memo line with the word *preferenced*. (i.e. "Haiti Trip, preferenced John Smith")
- Please have donors mail their checks to you. Please turn in all donations to the Vista Church office during office hours only or place them in the giving boxes in the back of the church auditorium during church services.
- Donors can make an online payment by going to www.vistachurch.com/global and then clicking on the appropriate link.

Biblical Principles for Raising Funds

1. Self-support: at times in Paul's ministry, he provided for his own financial needs by making tents. (Acts 18:1-4)
2. Making needs known: this means sharing the vision and ministry with friends and asking them to prayerfully consider supporting the ministry financially. (Phil. 4:10-20)
3. Looking to God: this means praying and making your needs known to God, knowing that we have His promise of provision. (Psalm 121)

Building a Support Team

You will need a support team that provides prayer, finances, and supplies for the trip. *The concept is to develop a team, not just to raise funds.* You will be responsible for developing your own support team.

Your support team should consist of:

- Prayer Supporters (at least 10) - the most important need is for people to pray for you before and during the mission trip
- Financial Contributors

Support Letters

If you are not paying for your trip on your own, the most effective and proven method to raise funds is to write a support letter to give to your friends, co-workers, neighbors, family, etc. People will give to people they know. Potential contributors are happy to have the opportunity to invest in someone they know personally or in an endeavor they care about.

Creating a list of 20+ people to whom you could send your support letter is usually a good start. Think through the different spheres of your life and start writing down who God has put in your life when you're creating that list. Also, you are strongly encouraged to be the first person to invest in your project. Consider how God would have you financially invest in your own trip.

Composing Your Letter

You are asking people to support the ministry of Vista Church. If you are asking for financial contributions, you are asking them to help with the cost that the church will incur by conducting the ministry (transportation, meals while on the field, in-country housing, travel insurance, etc.). A common testimony from team members is that while they were initially put off by the idea of sending support letters, their experience turned out to be a highlight of their trip because it prepared their hearts for the trip by building up their faith and confidence in God.

There are two types of letters: 1) a letter sent out asking for prayer support only and 2) a letter sent out asking for prayer and financial support.

Compose your own letter. Don't just copy information from a sample letter; make it personal and genuine.

You should include the following information in your letter:

- Information about the country & culture to which you are going. If you are traveling to a high security area, please follow the security guidelines provided to you by Vista Church about what you can and cannot say.
- Information about the sending organization (Vista) and the hosting organization (the missionary, agency, or church).
- Description of what the team will be doing (why the team is doing this particular project).
- The cost of the trip.
- Why you want to be involved on this trip.
- How God called you to go on this trip.
- How you would like the reader to be involved (prayer, financial, or both).
- Communicate clearly that all checks must be payable to **Vista Church**.

- Ask the reader to give or mail the check to you. Provide your mail address, telephone number and email address, as applicable. Tell them NOT to write your name on the memo line of the check.
- Include a response slip for them to send you or have them submit a note with the check explaining the reason for the gift. The note needs to include your name and trip name so that the money gets allocated correctly in Managed Missions.
- Include the church name, address, and phone number.

It is your responsibility to keep accurate records of who has supported you and with what amount. Please send all of your supporters a personal board or note for their gift, support or prayer.

Your support letter must be approved by your Trip Leader before you send it out to potential supporters.

Sample Support Letter

(Date)

Dear (Name),

I wanted to let you know about an exciting opportunity that I will have in July. A group from our church is going on a mission trip to Titanyen, Haiti. We will leave on Thursday, July 7 and return on Saturday, July 16. While in Haiti, we will be working with local missionaries and national brothers and sisters to help plant a church in an unreached area. Our efforts will help plant seeds of the gospel and support the work of those working full-time in this area.

Please pray for our team in the upcoming months as God prepares our hearts and minds for this adventure. Also, be in prayer for the people with whom God will allow us to share Christ's love. Attached you will find a daily prayer guide. The most important thing you can do to support our team is to pray for us every day.

I feel strongly that God has called me to go on this trip. I want to live out the "Great Commission" and am so excited about the opportunity to reach and unreached people group with the Gospel. I know this will challenge me spiritually and I look forward to seeing how God will use my team and myself to advance His Kingdom!

In addition to prayer support, there are financial needs as well. The cost of the trip is \$1,400, which each team member is responsible to raise in gifts for our church. Gifts to the church, with an expression of a preference for my trip expenses, are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. If you are able to make a gift to the church to help with my expenses, you can give online at www.vistachurch.com/global or by mailing me a check payable to "Vista Church" with "Haiti, preferenced (your name)" in the memo line. This financial gift is being asked for with the understanding that Vista Church has complete direction and control over the use of all donated funds.

(Provide them your contact information - mailing address, telephone number and email address as applicable. This information could go on an attached response slip)

I look forward to sharing stories of God's work in Haiti with you when we return. If you have any questions please feel free to call me at (your phone number or email).

Thank you!
(Your Name)

*****the section in bold must be included with this wording but with your information***

Passport Procedures

You can obtain the latest passport application information online at www.usps.com/passport.

It could at least 6-8 weeks, sometimes more, to receive your passport, so it is vital that you begin working on your passport application as soon as possible.

In order to obtain a passport, you will need:

1. A certified birth certificate (not the hospital record)
2. Two passport photos
3. A driver license or other government ID

NOTE: For your passport to be valid or current for international travel, it may NOT expire within 6 months of your trip return.

Vaccines

For more information on vaccines and health questions, visit the Center for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov, click on *Travel and Vaccinations* to get up-to-date information on the shots needed for the country to which you are traveling.

You can get vaccines at Walgreens, CVS, your personal doctor, or the Orlando County Health Department.

Packing

Here are some helpful packing tips:

- Pack light! You will have to carry what you pack.
- Clearly tag all luggage with your name and contact information. Putting neon-colored tape on your suitcase can be helpful for identification.
- Take luggage you don't mind having damaged.
- Carry one change of clothes and some toiletries with you in your carry-on luggage, as well as any medications you will need for the trip. Sometimes luggage is lost and/or delayed.
- Take items you won't mind leaving behind if you see a need (clothes, shoes, etc.)
- Leave room for small souvenirs.

Commonly Needed Items

- Bible, Journal, and Pen
- Passport
- Visa (if applicable)
- Passport copies (one for the Trip Leader and one in each suitcase)
- Health card for proof of needed immunizations (if required)
- Basic clothing
- Comfortable shoes
- Plastic bags (to pack dirty clothes)
- Hat
- Sunglasses
- First Aid items

- Medicines
- Camera
- Toiletries
- Towel and washcloth
- Insect repellent with Deet (if applicable)
- Shower flip-flops
- Raincoat, jacket, or umbrella
- Snack foods
- Cash for personal expenses and souvenirs
- Flashlight
- Electrical current adapter
- Water bottle
- Travel sickness medicine
- Ear plugs (if night noise bothers you)
- Reading material for travel

Security Guidelines

Vista Church is engaged in missional outreach around the world. Some areas are classified as high security for many reasons but not limited to: government regulations on religious conversions, radical religious groups from other faiths, political unrest, etc. Consideration of our partners on the ground is required so that we do not put them at risk.

We are committed to keeping our people safe and would never intentionally put you in harm's way. However, the world is a dark and dangerous place for those proclaiming the name of Jesus to unbelievers. Therefore, we will always err on the side of caution in all of our actions.

Things to be Aware of:

It is always helpful to research and know the current political and religious climate of the country to which you are traveling. Understanding the culture of the people to whom you will be ministering is also helpful. However, you should never engage in political discussions about the country to which you are traveling or about your own country. Should the subject come up, you should refrain from talking about it, by whatever means necessary, and change the subject.

Although we often have open discussions as to why one religion might be wrong in our own country, it can be detrimental in another country. Stick to the truth of what you believe and refrain from pointing out the error of another religion. Doing so could have dire implications for you, our partners on the ground, and national believers.

You should remove "church" words from your vocabulary. Replace "church" with "fellowship," "missionary" with "friend," "Vista Church" with "our group." Be sensitive that there are people who are not happy that you are in their country and they are listening for things to determine why you are there. Praying publicly before your meal may not be a good idea depending on where you are.

Luggage, Media, and Travel Visas:

Please keep up with your luggage at all times. Never let your luggage leave your sight until you check it with a certified airline employee. Never let anyone, other than a certified airline employee, look in or open your luggage. Always keep your carry-on luggage with you at all times and never leave it unattended. Never agree to transport any extra bags or luggage for anyone. Please understand that drug traffickers are looking for easy ways to transport illegal items into the USA, and they would love to use an innocent church missionary as their host.

Concerning media, please do not grant interviews with any form of international media. There is a possibility that media groups are looking for ways to expose missionaries and groups to have them expelled from their country. This means no newspaper or television interviews abroad. Allow the host missionaries to handle all forms of media.

When filling out travel visas or country admission forms, please be discrete about your presence. When asked for the reason for your trip, simply put tourist.

Protecting Career Missionaries in Country:

Those people who have answered the call to serve in high security areas have spent a great deal of time prior to going to make sure their name is clear of any association with mission outreach. Great lengths have been taken to remove their name from any type print or internet media that could associate them with international missions. It is imperative that we do not reverse this effort by printing their names in bulletins, posting on websites, posting on digital prayer media, etc. Anonymity for the international mission is imperative, so posting or distributing a picture of them is out of the question.

Social Media:

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. have given us a tremendous way to communicate with others. However, our friend list consists of people we often know in a very vague way. In fact, we may not know some of them at all. In addition, we have seen sites who have promised our privacy and then voluntarily sold our information. For this reason, Vista has taken the stance that we will post nothing in regard to our trips to these high security areas. That means no updates, pictures, "check ins," etc. Please understand that this measure is in place to protect you, us others going, and those who are there long term, and the national believers who are consistently in harm's way. Nothing means nothing, so understand that you will be isolated from your ability to post on social media in relation to your whereabouts or reason for being there.

Adding national believers to your friend list seems like a great idea while you are in-country. However, you don't know with whom they are affiliated on social media and how your posts may be viewed in light of those peoples' beliefs and prejudices. In social media, we often discuss a variety of topics from religion to politics to humor. All those things can be taken in a variety of different ways, depending on the culture point from which you are viewing them. For this reason, our policy is that you do not "friend" nationals. It's rare that the subject of social media will come up unless you bring it up. However, if it does, you can simply say that you don't want to friend them as a way to keep them safe and you can exchange email addresses with them.

Email after a High Security Trip:

We understand the need for you to communicate about your trip to others upon your return. There are so many reasons to do so, such as letting family know about your trip and enlisting others in the call to missions. However, email can be just as dangerous as social media in some respects. They can be forwarded, copied, attached to prayer chains, etc.

So, when you do use email, please follow these guidelines:

1. Do not pinpoint your country or specific location in the email. If you went to the city Bethlehem in Israel, then your email should say, "I had a great experience in B while I was in I."
2. Do not use the missionary's name in the email or the name of their sending organization.
3. Do not use the names of national believers.
4. Do not send emails to groups or your entire contact list. Be specific and send only to those who you specifically choose from your list one email at a time.
5. Ask that your email not be forwarded, reposted, or copied. You can't be assured this will happen but you can ask.
6. If you are communicating with a national believer, be advised that some country's email is filtered by government agencies. It is important that you keep these emails generic and vague when it comes to politics and religion.