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# *Short-Term Mission/Service Teams: yes or no?*

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Notes:

There are numerous organizations on the web and on FaceBook which have the name Mission Haiti.

Photos are where we have been in the last 3 years.

## Introduction

We often hear discussion surrounding the value of short-term missions; and after leading more than 60 teams with people from all over the US from many different churches and talking to dozens of people who have been on trips that Mission:Haiti and other organizations have led, I think I can comment with some experience.

## Don't go if....

First, let me say that short-term missions/service teams aren't for everyone. If you are considering a trip, pray about it, decide if you can be flexible, if you can sacrifice the comforts of the first world, and if you can be open-minded toward other cultures and ways of doing things. If you can't live without hot water, Starbucks, and electronics, if you think that "we" are the only ones who do things right, if you have a negative outlook on things and



Hunting for food - 2015

other people, you probably will not do well on a short-term mission trip. You need to be willing to get the needed shots or medicine, read the materials, follow the instructions, humble yourself, and be a team player. That means taking direction, possibly changing plans if the leader determines that circumstances warrant, and being concerned about the well-being of others before your own.

## Goals

The goals of short-term mission/service trips need to be accomplishable in the span of a week or two and involves connecting people to God and to the local church. The work should support outreach but not replace the normal outreach or evangelism of the indigenous church. The goal of the trip should not be fundraising for the organization you are traveling with.



Jubilee Church - 2013

## Emphasis

If the trip is to be of value to those it seeks to serve, it must emphasize the following things:

1) The work must be focused on giving God the glory through service. (Sometimes local leaders and pastors are looking to increase their prestige or influence within their community, and they will choose work that they think will accomplish that.)

2) Be sure that the Gospel is central. (When, where, and how will the Good News of Christ's love and sacrifice be shared? Will it be shared in a culturally appropriate and safe way?)

3) If it is a work or construction team, are jobs being taken away from local people who need work, or will it teach skills, provide work, or help the local economy?

4) If the team is teaching, has enough research been done to be sure that the material and methods are relevant to the culture? (For instance, telling people in a third world culture to eat by the first world food pyramid is not helpful since those foods may not be available or affordable).

5) Are you being asked to do things you are capable of? (If you are from Northern Minnesota, doing construction in Haiti in August is a very bad idea. Heat stroke is no joke.)

6) What is your transportation like? (Seriously, you would not drive around standing up in the back of an unsafe, rickety truck in the U.S.; why would you do that in the third world?)

7) What about security? (You need security not because you expect something to happen but to help you avoid any security issues.)

8) Prepare yourself. Read what you are asked to read, bring what you are asked to bring, follow the organization's instructions. In the case of short-term missions, permission is better than forgiveness.

9) Please don't become a mission tourist. Too many people use mission trips as a way to see the world and compare. They hop from country to country, never making any heart-to-heart connections. They will gladly tell you about all their mission trips, but somehow it seems shallow and all about them...what they did, what they saw. Mission trips should be about God and what He is doing and about those being served, not about the servants.



Lighting with a candle - 2015

## Value

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What value is there in short-term mission/service trips?

1) It can connect the global church. It helps third world Christians feel less alone and teaches first world Christians that joy is in God, not in stuff.

2) It can teach skills, bring knowledge and encouragement, and alleviate short-term suffering in the field.

3) It can teach compassion, joy in service, and humility to the team member.

4) It fulfills the command of Christ to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and serve our brothers and sisters in need.

5) It can assist the local church in identifying needs and alleviating issues. (Identifying special needs in the community and connecting those to the pastor and/or elders. Alleviating issues can involve teaching women how to better care for their children, the reasons & methods of good hygiene, and sharing life & work skills.)

## Focus

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A short-term mission is not about you. It is about God. It's about getting out of the pew and being The Body of Christ. It's about letting God break our hearts for what breaks His. It's about growing up in faith and walking our talk, not just talking the walk. It's about opening up to new experiences, new cultures, and brothers and sisters who are not like us, and then allowing God to transform us. A short-term mission is about love. It's about letting God's love flow through you, not just to you. If you can't love outside your closed circle, you won't get it. If you open your heart to God's love, you will never get enough.

