



**Global
Connect**
CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Planning Guide for
**International
Trips**



Introduction

This resource is designed to assist Australian Christian schools in the planning and implementation of international trips, including the successful integration of these trips into the school's learning program.

These trips provide a myriad of benefits for students, including::

- » Enhancing their development as compassionate global citizens
- » Deepening their understanding and appreciation of other cultures
- » Increasing their maturity and social competence
- » Opportunities to develop leadership and problem-solving skills
- » Opportunities for personal and spiritual growth, including a greater understanding of their sense of self in relation to God, others and creation.

The broader school community also benefits from the experience of the team, as they share their learning experiences with students, staff and parents. The trips help deepen cross-cultural partnerships and reinforce a school culture that promotes a sense of belonging in a globalised world and celebration of the diversity that God has created.

- » For overseas trips to be most effective, they need to:
- » Have a clearly stated purpose in line with the mission and strategic plan of the school
- » Be well-planned in collaboration with all stakeholders, including the Principal or Head of School, other staff, parents and in-country partners
- » Incorporate activities that allow students to reflect on their experiences and consider how to further respond.

While many trips have a broad purpose, consider whether your trip would be more effective with a focused purpose, for example:

1

Exploring Christianity in context

Deepen your understanding of how people in another country (e.g. Fiji) engage with, learn about and worship God. How does this new understanding affect the expression of our faith?

2

Abolishing modern slavery

Research the many factors that enable slavery to continue in a specific country (e.g. Thailand), what modern slavery looks like, the local, national and global policies in place to protect people and how vulnerable people are being empowered. What does the Bible have to say about this issue and how can we be part of the solution?

3

To the ends of the earth

Learn about how the Gospel has travelled to this country (e.g. Solomon Islands), what have been the effects (both good and bad) of mission here, and how is the local church evangelising to a new generation? How can we encourage and equip the local church in its work?

4

Moving into the future

Explore a fast-growing economy (e.g. India) and the rise of government reform, business innovation, e-commerce, and a dynamic young workforce (with a high number of STEM graduates). Consider how these changes have occurred, what they might mean for the future of the nation and the world, and how binaries of ancient and modern culture, rich and poor or old and young might be exacerbated. How can we celebrate and learn from India's success while retaining our Christian values and heritage?

5

Education around the world

Compare the access and quality of education available in urban or rural settings in another country (e.g. Cambodia) with urban or rural settings in Australia. What is the same and what is different? What are some of the needs? How can we be part of the solution so that all children can have access to a quality education?

Planning Timeline

The purpose of your international trip will determine your itinerary, your pre-trip training and the research and inquiry-based questions that your students pose and examine throughout the experience. Also consider whether you can link this overseas experience into a learning opportunity for all students (in a particular class or grade), regardless of whether they attend the trip or not.

In order to ensure that your trip is well-planned, it is best to begin planning a year in advance of the departure date. The following timeline can assist with planning a mission trip but should not be seen as an exhaustive guide.

PRIOR TO DEPARTURE

8 to 12 months

- » Gain the approval of the Principal or Head of School to conduct preliminary planning for the international trip
- » When you have received approval, determine the following in collaboration with your in-country contacts:
 - Purpose of the trip
 - Trip location
 - Specific trip dates
 - Minimum and maximum numbers of team members required (including staff, students and parents)
 - Draft itinerary – including accommodation, day visits, in-country transport, meal locations
 - Total cost of the trip per student – including flights, travel insurance, staffing, and in-country costs
- » Define the educational expectations of the trip and how these are relevant to the school's curriculum, mission and strategic plan
- » Conduct a risk assessment for the trip to ensure that safety and welfare of all trip participants is carefully considered (see **Sample International Trip Risk Assessment** resource)
- » Construct a list of emergency contacts for the trip including the closest Australian Embassy or Consulate, emergency assistance in-country, local partner contact information and key contacts at school
- » Begin familiarising yourself with the country you are wanting to visit, including the language, cultural practices, belief systems, history, etc.
- » Gauge student interest in the trip and determine the special responsibilities of staff or parents on the trip

6 to 8 months

- » Lodge an 'Approval of International Trip' draft application form and relevant attachments with the Principal or Head of School (see International Trip Policy resource for assistance with this). This application must include:
 - Proposed dates, itinerary, accommodation and breakdown of costs
 - Emergency contacts and safety procedures
 - Preliminary risk assessment
 - Draft letter to parents with details of the trip
 - Draft medical information, teacher application and student application forms
 - Draft parent consent form
 - Immunisation requirements and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade contact details
- » When the trip is formally approved, begin advertising and open the application process to teachers and students.
- » Hold an information session for parents and invite them to ask questions or voice concerns.

3 to 6 months

- » Assess all submitted applications and select team members (staff, students and accompanying adults).
 - When selecting teachers to attend the trip, consider their maturity, leadership ability and understanding of the culture, belief systems and language of the destination country. A well- developed knowledge of the destination country will assist staff in communicating with parents and developing related learning activities for the students in the planning phase, as well as on the trip. Staff should be informed of their responsibilities on the trip before they apply to participate.
 - When selecting students to attend the trip, consider the age, maturity and ability of students involved.
 - When selecting accompanying adults, ensure that they have completed a Working with Children Check.

- » Notify all applicants of their success and send them final trip details as soon as possible.
- » Finalise all trip details – including booking flights, accommodation, final itinerary, meals, travel insurance, etc.
- » Note: Ensure all trip participants have a passport that is valid for six months past the return date of the trip. Also, if any trip participants are travelling on a non-Australian passport, make sure you check all visa requirements for that passport.
- » Conduct team building and training – effective pre-trip training significantly increases the impact of the experience in the lives of both those who go and those who receive the team. It is critical for students to understand their own culture and its underlying assumptions and values before they can build their understanding of other cultures. It is also important that the team begins to function well together and experience a sense of unity prior to departure.
- » It is recommended that training include a minimum of six sessions, covering the following topics:
 - Team building
 - Raising support
 - Cross-cultural adaptations and culturally appropriate behaviour
 - Expectations, attitudes and policies
 - Language learning (songs, basic greetings)
 - Ministry preparation (writing testimonies)
 - Evangelism training
 - Spiritual development (prayer, journaling)
 - Packing and travel (passports, appropriate clothing, etc.)
 - Health and safety
 - Pre-departure learning activities – including awareness about their own culture, beliefs, values and comfort zones, stereotypical perceptions they may have about the culture they are entering, and posing research and inquiry questions they can investigate on the trip that are linked to your trip purpose (these could be about the culture, key employment industries, belief systems, social norms, family values, political regimes, etc.).
- » Conduct fundraising activities if required – encourage students to take ownership over the fundraising process and come up with creative ideas for engaging their community and raising financial support (see – **Fundraising Ideas** resource).

1 to 3 months

- » Submit final 'Approval of International Trip' application form with any amendments to names, travel dates, trip details, DFAT travel advice, etc.
- » Continue team building and training
- » Collect supplies for the trip or resources to hand out to schools – best practice is to give gifts to schools or village leaders, so they can be shared amongst the community, not to individual students or families. Speak to your local contact about appropriate gifts or an appropriate monetary gift (not exorbitant).
- » Reinforce expectations for students and staff as ambassadors of the school, the country and of Jesus Christ
- » Allocate specific responsibilities for activities, testimonies, etc.
- » Create a hardcopy folder for the Team Leader that includes copies of the following:
 - Student application forms
 - Signed parent consent forms
 - Student medical information forms
 - Emergency management plans
 - Contact details list with Embassy/Consulate details, in-country contacts, school contacts and emergency contact details for students and staff
 - Travel insurance policy
 - Passports and visas for all trip participants
- » Ensure first aid kit is up-to-date
- » Update risk assessment
- » Submit a statement from the Team Leader to the Principal of Head of School confirming that all student application forms, parent consent forms, medical information forms, emergency contact details and copies of travel insurance details have been received.

On the trip

- » At all times on the trip, it is important to ensure that duty-of-care arrangements are in place and that the physical and emotional safety and wellbeing of students is prioritised.
- » Throughout the trip, be aware of:
 - Potential risks and their control measures, as well as security of personal belongings
 - Culturally appropriate dress and behaviour and adherence to the school's code of conduct by students and staff
 - Unexpected changes in the itinerary, accommodation or travel arrangements and ensure any changes are communicated back to the Principal or Head of School for approval
 - Staff and student wellbeing – ensure that time is set aside for staff and students to rest and be refreshed through daily devotions and debriefing sessions, as well as personal or recreational time
 - Tracking daily spending, including keeping all receipts
- » Wherever possible, the Team Leader should stay in contact with the school and parents and provide regular updates, whether through a private Facebook group, the school's social media pages, an online photo album, or other forms of communication.
- » While students will experience many unintended learning outcomes through their intercultural experience, if possible, also include some structured learning activities that deepen student's engagement with the unknown world around them. For example, encourage students to be 'cultural detectives', observing food, classrooms, verbal and non-verbal behaviour, family dynamics, etc. and consider how you might help them to process these insights and appreciate the points of difference. Deepen their engagement with the culture by encouraging them to speak to a variety of people regarding their research and inquiry questions, and considering different points of view.
- » Encourage students and staff to capture learning experiences via photos, videos, journal entries and blog posts.

- » Make sure you set aside time at the end of your trip to debrief on the trip as a whole and begin processing all you've seen and learnt. Questions you might ask students to reflect on are:
 - What did I learn about myself and about God on this trip?
 - What did I learn from the local community and people I met on this trip?
 - How has my understanding of other cultures changed?
 - What did I learn or experience that will change the way I represent Jesus here at home?
 - What was the most challenging aspect of this trip? Why? How did I deal with that?
 - What was the most rewarding aspect of this trip? Why?
 - How can I continue to practice service and support for the local church and people in need now that I'm back home?
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Upon return

- » The trip does not end upon your return to Australia! Students and staff often encounter reverse culture shock when coming home and can be overwhelmed by the sensory overload from all they've experienced but have not yet processed. Consequently, it is vital that the team spends time both during and after the trip reflecting on what they have observed and how these observations can be integrated into both their own personal understanding, and the school's learning programs.
- » After returning home, ensure that you:
 - Check in with students and staff to see how they are adjusting to life back at home, and talk through any challenges or difficulties associated with 're-entry'.

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- Help students to draw together the insight they have gained through their research and inquiry questions – what do they do with this information from here? How can they continue to process and practically implement the lessons they have learned? They may wish to raise funds or become an advocate for a particular project or issue, to petition their local MP or pursue a different career option. Guide and encourage them through this process.
- Share what you, as a team, have experienced. This holds you accountable to the school community who supported you but also communicates the value of trips in enabling students to develop an understanding of their place in a globalised world, while experiencing academic, spiritual and emotional growth.
 - ◊ You could share your experiences through presentations to students, staff, parents and the School Council; school displays of student writing, photos or cultural artefacts; media releases to local news outlets; articles in the school's newsletter or posts on the school's website and social media pages.
- Engage staff in key learning outcomes from the trip. The trips can be a great opportunity to enrich your school's curriculum through sharing resources and increased understanding of different approaches to teaching. Provide opportunities for staff to share what they have seen and learnt and how these observations might improve school practice.
- Thank your local partners for hosting you! Often, our local partners in developing nations expend a great deal of time and money into hosting teams, often at the expense of their regular jobs and time with their family. Send a follow-up email to thank them and pass on encouraging comments from students and staff about the impact of the trip.
- Maintain and deepen partnerships. A deep, genuine relationship is at the heart of every successful partnership between schools, so stay in touch! Wherever possible, find ways for your classes to partner together on collaborative project-based learning assignments, share stories, photos and updates about school life and learn one another's language so that students who did not participate in the trip can be drawn into the relationship.
- » Evaluate your trip experience. A formal evaluation should be undertaken by the school within one month of returning from a trip. Consider what worked well and what didn't, and how well the trip achieved its intended outcomes. This evaluation should include all aspects of the program and process. Seek feedback from students, staff, parents and your host school or organisation (if applicable).

