

Preparing yourself

Many people recognise that there is a need to prepare for a short-term mission trip, but they don't always know where to start, and can end up with an imbalance in their preparation. Good preparation takes account of the fact that we are body, mind and spirit, and prepares each of those facets of us.

Body. The obvious body preparation is to make sure you get all the inoculations you need for the country you're visiting (see How to stay alive) but there are other preparations you can do as well. It may be helpful to improve your general fitness, particularly if you're going to be on a building team or living at high altitude. Getting plenty of sleep before you go so that you can recover more quickly from jetlag is a good idea. If you regularly drink coffee, alcohol or processed foods, it might be a good idea to start weaning yourself off them so you don't have withdrawal symptoms if you can't get them where you're going. On the practical side, you may need to take with you special clothing or equipment for dealing with the climate or conditions.

Mind. Make sure you prepare yourself intellectually by learning about the country you're going to, and learning a bit of the language. But also make sure you think about yourself too, how you deal with the unfamiliar, what gives you security, and how you work in a team. That way you'll be ready emotionally for the challenges ahead. You could take some 'comfort blankets' to help you deal with insecurity, and plan how to tell other people that you're grumpy in the mornings.

Spirit. People often forget the spiritual preparation but it's just as important as the other two. Make sure you have regular times of prayer as you get ready. Pray together with other people as well as on your own. Pray for yourself and your needs, but also the other team members, the work that you're going to do, and the people you're going to serve. As you read the Bible, think about how the verses you read apply to the context of your mission. Ask God to make your mission fruitful, and to show you how you need to change and develop to make your contribution effective.

You should also be getting advice on how to prepare from the agency you're going with. If your church has a missions team they can give you advice too, or you can seek out people who've done it before who can support you as you prepare.