

What, where and with whom?

Your biggest decision is not deciding whether you want to do a short-term mission trip, but what it's going to look like. There are three variables – what you do, where you go, and which organisation you go with. You may know the answer to all of these, or none, but start with what you know. Have you always had a burning desire to visit a particular country? Do you have friends who work with a specific sending agency, or has anyone in your church done a short-term mission before? Have you got skills that are needed in certain situations? Starting with these certainties will make the decision-making easier.

First, what you're going to do. For some of us it may be easy – if you're a good bricklayer, a doctor, or a skilled musician, there will be plenty of obvious opportunities, but many of us are willing amateurs. This doesn't matter – willing amateurs are always useful in the field.

Where you go may be a matter of personal preference. You may think you'll fit in better in a particular culture, or already have some contacts in another country. Or you may always have been fascinated by one country. Facts like these are the place to start.

Who you go with can be problematic. There are so many agencies offering short-term teams these days, it can be hard to know which to pick. If you're part of a denominational church, try their own sending agency first (e.g. CMS, BMS, Elim Missions). If you have contacts in missions already, try their sending agency. You'll also find a list of some of the organisations we've experience of on our links page (under 'resources').

From the outset your planning should be prayerful. This is not so much about what you want to do, as what God wants you to do. Ask where God wants to send you. Be open to guidance as you think about your plans. Discuss it with friends, and with church leaders, so that between you God's calling can be discerned. A short-term mission trip is not just a holiday and needs to be approached seriously.

One of the best search engines you can use for short-term is the Christian Vocations website – www.christianvocations.org. All the major short-term providers advertise in their Short-Term Services Directory and one click will give you a list of all the agencies working in a given country, or doing a particular function. Whichever organisation you end up with, make sure they've signed up to the Global Connections Code of Best Practice (look under 'codes and standards' at www.globalconnections.co.uk). This will ensure that they are committed to training you and managing your project effectively.