





ADVENTURE PLAN-IT GUIDE INDEX

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Hi, Fearless Trip Leader!

Are you ready for an incredible adventure in missions? I pray so. And we want to help you get ready.

From my own youth ministry experience, I know the importance of selecting the right trip, gaining the support of pastors, parents, and participants, and setting solid plans to make the mission trip a reality.

You've already taken a great first step by choosing **Group's Lifetree Adventures**®. Ever since I launched the first Group mission trip 40 years ago, we've helped hundreds of thousands of people deliver God's love to the disadvantaged throughout the country and around the world.

You can trust our highly experienced team to connect you with meaningful work projects, handle all the details, and provide a carefully designed discipleship experience woven throughout the week. That experience comes from the creative team behind Group Magazine, Group curriculum, and Group VBS.

You're about to experience a life-changing adventure in missions. You'll go to serve—and come home as friends of God.

Thom Schultz

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Group Founder and President

P.S. This Free Adventure Plan-it Guide is full of tools and information to help make your journey as easy as can be! We've even given you some creative ways to talk to pastors, the church board, and parents. Feel free to copy or revise these notices for your communications.



THE POWER OF A MISSION TRIP

You've seen it happen: Teenagers who grew up in the church suddenly decide to simply...walk away.

Walk away from your youth group. From the church. Perhaps from God.

As someone who cares about both teenagers and God, it breaks your heart. You wish there was something more you could do, something that could nail shut the back door some of your teenagers are using to slip away.

The **Barna** organization suggests there is something you can do to engage and retain your kids—and it all happens on a Group's Lifetree Adventure missions trip.

According to Barna, giving your kids immersive experiences and focusing on discipleship and relationship is key.

And that's exactly what happens on Group's Lifetree Adventures® mission trips.

In fact, 74 percent of youth leaders say mission trips are the most important element of immersive youth ministry, ranking it significantly higher than retreats and summer camp.

At Group's Lifetree Adventures mission trips, your kids are all-in.

They're completely immersed in helping others, both at their service sites and in the school or church where they're staying. They're pulled out of their daily rut and pulled a bit past their comfort zones...which is why it's easier for them to see and hear from Jesus.

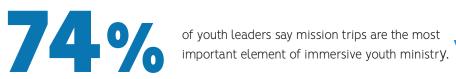
They're actually looking for Jesus—and are delighted that they see and hear from him. What they experience lavs an unshakable faith foundation.

At Group's Lifetree Adventures mission trips, your kids focus on discipleship.

Helping your kids deepen their friendship with and dependence on Jesus is the primary focus of our mission trips. It's first and last, the only way we measure success.

Yes, your group will do significant work helping people who need their help. But it's discipleship that's our focus in every evening program, every devotion, every encounter your kids have with our staff.

We want what you want: To see your kids go deep with God, to connect with God's heart, and choose to be God's friends.







At Group's Lifetree Adventures mission trips, your kids deepen their friendships.

It's no accident—we're intentional about providing opportunities for honest, transparent conversation. You'll get to know your kids like you've not known them before—and that's true of how they'll come to know and value one another, too.

It's those relationships that will transform your youth group. That will give it a "stickiness" that will not only keep your current crop of kids coming, but magnetically attract more teenagers as well.

And then there's this...

You can't measure the impact of a mission trip by the number of nails pounded or kids hugged at a community center. That's all good, but there's something deeper.

It's how your teenagers finally grapple with doubts they've kept hidden for years.

How you see teenagers support one another, and rally to help one another.

How you hear prayers that get past the pat to what's most important.

How you see hearts—and lives—transformed.

You'll have more quality time with your teenagers at Group's Lifetree Adventures mission trips than you'll have with them the rest of the year. And we'll help you make the most of that time—before, during, and after your mission trip.

Group's Lifetree Adventures mission trips are powerful because they provide the space for you and your group to take a step closer to Jesus. Go to serve. Come home as friends of God.



Group's Lifetree Adventures offer immersion experiences that blend service and discipleship to transform lives. You need a mission experience that lets you focus on going deeper with God and others... and that's exactly what happens on a Group Lifetree Adventures mission trip.

Come be a part of an unforgettable week of service... discipleship...and friendship. A week where you can see God working in and through your group.

Feel free to share this article with your pastor, church board, or parents.





ATTN: YOUTH MINISTRY LEADERS

CONSIDERING A MISSION TRIP

Deciding on a mission trip can be tricky! We've created some thought-provoking questions that are a great starting point to identifying the right mission experience for your group. After you go through the questions on your own, check out the other "Question and Answer" pages to guide you through talking to your lead pastor, the church board, parents, and students about why a mission trip is perfect for your group. Before going through these questions, it may be helpful to read the article titled *The Power of a Mission Trip.*

- **Casting a Vision for the Mission Trip.** As you think about a mission trip, what are your hopes and expectations for your group? What is the biggest opportunity you see for helping people in your congregation grow in their faith? What is the biggest challenge or barrier?
- Immersing Discipleship With Service. Studies show that ministering to today's youth requires an emphasis on discipleship. What does "discipleship" mean to you? How is your youth group currently addressing the challenge of discipleship? What aspects must be present in a mission trip for real, transformative life change to take place in youth?

- Selecting the Mission Trip. Which mission
 organization should your church use? What type of
 trip is best for your specific youth group? Explore trip
 offerings with different locations and service types.
 What criteria will you use to select an organization
 and trip that will have maximum long-term impact
 both for your youth and the people you'll be serving?
- Funding the Mission Trip. What's the best way to fund a mission trip? How will you present budgeting and cost options to the church board, parents, and youth? (youth fund all, church funds all, church participates in some funding, etc.)
- Organizing the Mission Trip. Who will be in charge of handling the logistics of the trip? Will you be the primary contact person between the church and the mission organization? How many participants and leaders do you need or expect to attend? When does a final decision need to be reached?
- **Ensuring Safety on the Trip.** How will you ensure that the trip is safe and secure? How will you present this information to parents and the church board?
- **Next Steps.** What's the next step? Board approval? A conversation with the senior pastor? Reaching out to students and parents?





ATTN: PASTORS

CONSIDERING A MISSION TRIP

Deciding on a mission trip is a big decision! Here are some answers to questions that might come up while deciding whether a Group Lifetree Adventures® mission trip is right for your group.

A tip: Before launching into these questions, it may be helpful for you to read the article titled *The Power of a Mission Trip.*

Q: Is a mission trip really that important in helping our congregation grow in their faith? Why can't we just serve locally?

A: A recent Barna study shows that the most effective ways to combat the trend of youth leaving the church are through engaging them in meaningful, immersive experiences with a focus on discipleship and relationship. Mission trips take kids—and adults—out of their comfort zone and into environments where they're stretched and challenged to internalize their faith in new ways.

Q: Why a Group Lifetree Adventures trip?

A: Group's Lifetree Adventures are unique in their emphasis on discipleship through service and relationship building. Service and spiritual growth are "de-compartmentalized," and the entire experience is about going deeper into a new culture, deeper into relationships, and deeper into God's heart. Even if you typically travel with your denomination, adding a Lifetree Adventures trip to your mission schedule provides a new perspective on discipleship. Group's Lifetree Adventures also has long-term relationships with local churches and organizations in the areas we serve, so your group's service will have a long-lasting impact! We've been doing this since the '70s, and our team is knowledgeable and experienced in planning mission experiences.

Q: What about the cost of the trip?

A: Group's Lifetree Adventures are affordable, and the life-change that comes from immersing participants in a new, unfamiliar area for a week justifies the travel costs. The fee includes lodging, food, project coordination and supplies, discipleship programming, and more. (Your youth pastor has been equipped with a creative Fundraising Ideas page!)

Q: What about trip logistics?

A: Many logistical details are already taken care of by Group's Lifetree Adventures—all your church has to provide is people willing to go! Group's Lifetree Adventures will equip your church with tools like budgeting sheets, planning timelines, fundraising ideas, and pre-trip devotions to make the process easy.





ATTN: CHURCH BOARD

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Q: Are the trips safe?

A: Group's Lifetree Adventures places safety of participants as a number-one priority. Our team has years of experience ensuring that extra precautions are taken to make every aspect of the trip as safe as possible. Each location is visited in person before your group's arrival, and each worksite is checked for safety.

Q: Who can attend?

A: Anyone with a heart to serve! Some trips require youth to be above a certain age, but there are trips that are a great fit for families and adults in your congregation as well as youth.





ATTN: PARENTS

CONSIDERING A MISSION TRIP

Deciding on a mission trip is a big decision—and you'll want to make sure it's the right fit for your child. Here are answers to some questions that might come up while deciding whether a Group Lifetree Adventures® mission trip is right for your student.

A tip: Before launching into these questions, it may be helpful for you to read the article titled *The Power of a Mission Trip.*

- Q: Is a mission trip really that important in helping my son or daughter grow in their faith? Why can't we just serve locally?
- A: A recent Barna study shows that the most effective ways to combat the trend of youth leaving the church are through engaging youth in meaningful, immersive experiences with a focus on discipleship and relationship. Mission trips take kids out of their comfort zone and into environments where they're stretched and challenged to internalize their faith in new ways.

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Q: How can I get involved?

A: Join us as an adult leader and participant! Group Lifetree Adventures trips are a great fit for anyone with a heart to serve.

Q: What's the next step?

A: Check with your youth leader for information on important deadlines and future informational meetings!





ATTN: TEENAGERS

CONSIDERING A MISSION TRIP

Deciding whether to go on a mission trip is a big decision! Here are some questions to use as you think and pray about why a mission trip might be important for you.

Q: Is a mission trip really that important? Why can't I just serve locally?

A: Mission trips are a chance to step out of your comfort zone and into a new culture! This will stretch and change you in unique and transformative ways. You'll build relationships and learn more about God as you serve other people all while experiencing a brand-new place and lots of adventures!

Q: What will our group do on the trip?

A: During your Group Lifetree Adventure, you'll serve on construction sites doing home repair or relational ministry sites working with the elderly or children. (International trips may focus on a different type of service; check with your youth leader.) When you're not serving, you'll get the chance to have cultural, devotional adventures in the afternoon and participate in evening worship experiences.

Q: How will I pay for it? What if I already have a busy summer or plans to attend another camp or trip?

A: Group's Lifetree Adventures are affordable, and the fee includes lodging, food, project coordination and supplies, discipleship programming, and more. (Your youth pastor has a creative Fundraising Ideas page to get your group thinking of ways to raise funds.) Setting aside time in your summer to serve and grow closer to God will bring you home transformed. It's the adventure of a lifetime—you'll love it!

Q: What's the next step?

A: Check with your youth pastor for information on important deadlines and future informational meetings.





HOW TO CHOOSE THE TRIP THAT FITS

Choosing a mission trip for your group, family, or yourself can be overwhelming. There are so many options! How do you decide on a specific trip? Here are four steps to follow as you make your decision!

Step 1 – Determine your priorities

What's most important to you when looking for a short-term mission trip? Maybe you want to go to a specific location. Maybe you're looking to do a certain type of service, like construction or orphan care. Maybe you want lots of the details taken care of for you. Or maybe you're looking for a trip with a discipleship and spiritual growth component built in so you can serve and come home changed.

It's important to determine why you're feeling called to a short-term mission trip, and what the ideal outcomes and experiences look like for you or your group. Take time in prayer to determine how God is guiding you to serve. Then write down what factors must be present for you to be able to serve in that way. Rank the items in order of importance. Reference those priorities and criteria as you select an organization to travel with.

Step 2 – Look for an organization that shares your beliefs and passions

Your mission experience will be enhanced if you find an organization that you line up with on the "why" of missions and ministry. Serve with a company that has a mission you believe in. Different mission trip companies have different goals and visions when it comes to service. Group's Lifetree Adventures places a unique emphasis on discipleship through service and relationship. Every aspect of the mission trip is carefully designed to guide those serving and being served closer to each other and closer to God.

Shared passions help bring people together in immersive experiences like mission trips. Find an organization that shares in the mission that God has placed on your own heart.

Step 3 – Find the trip that fits

Now you've selected a mission organization that shares your passions and priorities. It's time to decide on a trip. Pause for a moment to consider the one-of-a-kind blend of talents and skills that your team—and you—bring to the table. You'll serve best





if you're operating within your giftings...while also being willing to step out of your comfort zone and be stretched when the situation calls. Most Group Lifetree Adventures trips allow participants to indicate which type of ministry they would like to do when they sign up for a trip (ministry to the elderly, children, construction). Be sure to select a trip that matches your group's special passions and abilities.

Step 4 – Sign up

It's time to take the leap! Spend time in prayer, talk to your group members, and make a commitment to a short-term mission trip. Whichever trip you choose, we hope it will be the adventure of a lifetime and bring you closer to God and closer to others. Stepping outside of everyday life and jumping into new experiences opens the door for God to do amazing things.

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What factors must be present for you to be able to serve on a short-term mision trip?





WHY GROUP LIFETREE ADVENTURES®?

If you're expecting to see lives change on a Group Lifetree Adventure mission trip, you won't be disappointed. But don't be surprised if the life changed most is your own!

That's because a Lifetree Adventure is transformative it's focused on blending service, faith, discipleship, and relationship.

Yes, you'll serve and help people in need. But along the way, you'll discover we've crafted experiences that draw your group closer to one another—and closer to God.

You'll see participants confront their doubts. Own their faith. And deepen friendships that will cement them into your group for the long haul.

Finding a mission trip isn't hard—but you're not looking for just a mission trip. You're after an adventure that builds your group into dedicated disciples as they serve.

And that's exactly what sets Group's Lifetree Adventures® apart from the herd.

With a Lifetree Adventures mission trip, you and your group will...

• Experience a new culture!

One-size-fits-all works well for baseball caps, but we think mission trips are a different ball game.

Each Lifetree Adventure is customized to immerse you in the culture of the location you're visiting—not from an outsider's view, but through the eyes of the people you're serving.

Whether you're rolling through a safari in Kenya or experiencing your first Native American powwow, you'll connect with God in uniquely crafted adventure that blends faith-building encounters with cultural experiences.

• Serve in the ways that you serve best!

We believe that God has given each person in your group unique gifts and passions.

If you choose a construction-based mission trip for your group, it may be a perfect fit for some participants, but you'll leave others out in the cold.

That's why most Lifetree Adventures trips allow individual participants to choose whether they'd rather haul lumber on a home repair site, minister at a nursing home, or work with children.

It's all service—and all discipleship.





Come home a Friend of God!

We're all for serving others, but true discipleship comes through relationship and experiences. That's how Jesus discipled others, and we think he got it right.

So our programs are carefully designed to facilitate relationship—and prompt deep thought and discussion through morning send-offs, onsite discussions, mystery adventures, and evening worship. It's the perfect recipe for long-term life change that lasts far after participants return home.

Mission trips are pivotal turning points for many people, the opportunity to search for answers and stability in a rapidly changing culture. For some, a mission trip marks their first decision to see Jesus for who he is and follow him. So buckle your seatbelts and pack your work boots! Group's Lifetree Adventures will take your group further than they've ever been before—further into a new culture, further into relationships, and further into God's heart.

When Group started doing mission trips over 40 years ago, we revolutionized short-term missions.

Those were great first steps, but the world today is far different than it was in 1977. And 1970s-style mission trips just don't cut it anymore.

You're ready for a fresh new approach. Your group is ready.

So this summer do it: Leave home to serve—and come home a Friend of God...with Group's Lifetree Adventures.







PLAN YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Mission experiences aren't "one size fits all," and that's why we're willing to help you create a trip that's a great fit for you and your group or family! Not finding the date or location that you want? Have a youth group but no adult sponsor? Traveling alone? We have a team ready to work with you to create the perfect trip.

- Group Lifetree Adventures® can create a custom trip just for your group. We'll work with you to find the right dates and locations.
- If you're an individual who's not traveling with a group, during the mission trip we'll connect you to another group and give you the opportunity to serve alongside others. You'll make a difference and build some great new relationships along the way.
- Have a special situation? Our Adventure Concierges are ready and willing to help you create an experience that's best for you and the people you'll serve.

Group's Lifetree Adventures are perfect for: adult small groups, women's ministry groups, men's groups, individuals, families, first-timers, and seasoned travelers.





FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Trip planning is exciting! But raising funds...not so much. We're sure of this, though; if the Lord has called you on a mission trip, he has a plan to provide the resources you need to get there. And if you embrace fundraising with enthusiasm and creativity, it can be a bonding, growing experience for you and your group before you ever arrive at your Lifetree Adventure!

Whether you're fundraising for your whole youth group or as an individual, use these **creative fundraising ideas** to get your imagination flowing. Before we get into specifics, remember these **3 keys** to fundraising:

- 1. **Pray.** Prayer makes a huge difference. Stay faithful and the Lord will provide. Stay consistent in prayer for the resources that will make it possible for you to serve.
- 2. Be creative and specific. Customize fundraising efforts to share the story of the people and causes you'll be serving. When people understand the WHY of your mission trip, they're more likely to want to partner with you financially. Going to Bolivia? Sell coasters made of the colorful textiles the country is known for. Is your team part of a clean water project? Display clean water statistics on bulletin boards around your church.
- 3. Always follow up. Make sure donors can see the difference that their money has made. Share pictures and videos with your church when you return from your trip and send personalized thankyou notes to individuals that donated.

Okay, are you ready? Here's how to raise those funds!

- · Create a church-wide donation board. If you're fundraising for a whole group and trying to get your entire church involved, a donation board is an interactive and visual tool that lets everyone see the progress that you're making. The best part? All you need is a bulletin board in a central location in your church. Pin paper shapes on the board with different dollar amounts written on them—\$5, \$20, \$50, even \$250. Also include several "choose your amount" paper shapes with blanks to fill in. On the back of each piece of paper include instructions about where to drop off or mail donations. Encourage church members to take a piece of paper with the dollar amount of their choice and commit to donating this amount to the trip. Customize your board with colors and shapes relating to your trip, and then watch the papers start to disappear!
- Sell handmade prayer reminders. Purchasing personalized T-shirts or other items to sell for your trip is expensive...so why not make them on your own? If you're taking a youth group, your whole group can work together on these easy-to-make projects—you don't even need to be "artsy"! Members of your congregation can purchase the homemade items as reminders to pray for the area you're traveling to serve, or you can use social media as a nifty tool to raise awareness even outside of your church.





- **Coffee mugs.** Buy some oil-based paint pens at your local craft store and create simple designs on inexpensive white mugs (find them online or at a dollar store.) Draw the shape of the country or state where you'll serve, write "Pray for _____", include a Bible verse reference, and add a colorful design on the handle or around the top of the mug. Bake the mugs at 350 degrees for 40 minutes in your oven to make the designs permanent and the mugs safe to wash.
- Bookmarks. Encourage people to buy these to stick in their Bibles for a daily prayer reminder. Cut the bookmarks out of solid-colored, heavy cardstock and thread a fun ribbon through a hole punched at the top. Decorating them is easy—cut the silhouette of the country or state you're serving out of colorful, patterned scrapbook paper. Glue a shape on the bookmark, write a Bible verse or prayer reminder, and add some stickers or doodled borders to finish it off.
- **Dry-erase prayer board.** Buy some inexpensive picture frames at the dollar store and slide a piece of pretty paper inside the frame. Hot glue inexpensive Scrabble tiles you find at craft stores online to spell "pray" or "trust" at the top of the frame. Toss in a dry-erase marker and a list of prayer requests concerning your Lifetree Adventure. Prayers can be written on the glass and then wiped away as donors pray for you.
- Write a great support letter. Mailing letters to friends and family asking for support is a go-to fundraising technique...but asking for money can be hard. Do this: Keep your letter short, neat, and free of

typos. Include information about where you're going and who you'll be serving. Briefly explain why you feel called to serve on this mission trip. Tell readers how they can be praying for you and support you in other ways—even if they're unable to support you financially. Be humble, respectful, say thank you, and give clear instructions at the end of the letter about where to send money and checks if readers want to donate. Again: Don't forget those thank-you notes!

- Share your mission. Ask your church if you can set up a small table or booth before and after worship services. Decorate the table and fill it with information—a map of your mission location, a flyer or handout with information about the trip and on how to go about donating. Put a jar on the table for on-the-spot donations!
- Wash some cars. It's a classic. Set up an easy, inexpensive car wash in your church parking lot. Announce the Sunday before the event that there will be an opportunity to have cars washed before and after service the next weekend. Rope off an area of the church parking lot, gather some buckets and sponges, and prepare to be covered in soap bubbles. Charge between \$5 to \$10 for each car and give the option for extra donations. Bonus: It's easy and fun for everyone going on the trip to participate and grow closer as a team while raising those important funds!

However you go about raising funds, to the best of your ability, make it a team project. It's a great way for you to connect with others who'll be serving with you and to forge deeper friendships!





YOUR DOMESTIC ADVENTURE TIMELINE!

1 year before your adventure:

- □ Pick the dates and location of your mission trip
- □ If you're traveling with an organization, confirm payment procedures, forms to complete, and deposit dates. Mark them on your calendar!

9 months before your adventure:

- □ Have your first informational meeting with potential participants. Provide an overview of general trip information, costs, and participant expectations
- □ Schedule future team meetings leading up to trip

6 months before your adventure:

- Deadline for commitments from participants
- □ Begin pre-trip training or devotionals for both participants and leaders
- □ Begin fundraising (Check out our handy Fundraising Ideas page)
- \Box Meet with leaders separately to explain their roles

3 months before your adventure:

- Distribute necessary forms to participants (release forms, background checks, etc.)
- □ Make transportation arrangements to mission trip location

1 month before your adventure:

- □ Check forms and verify all necessary forms are completed
- $\hfill\square$ Buy supplies your group needs for the trip
- □ Share packing and supplies list with participants
- □ Collect health insurance information from participants and leave a photocopy in the church office

1 week before your adventure:

- □ Hold a final team meeting to answer questions and review final details
- □ Have a "prep day" to prepare and pack supplies

Day of your adventure!:

- □ Set meeting time one hour before you need to leave
- □ Make sure parents have location information and number where you can be reached
- □ Pack up supplies and luggage
- \Box Pray for the trip ahead
- \Box Take a picture of your team





YOUR INTERNATIONAL ADVENTURE TIMELINE!

1 year before your adventure:

- □ Pick the dates and location of your mission trip
- □ Have an informational meeting with potential participants to discuss the dates of trip, cost, trip details, and participant expectations
- □ If you're traveling with an organization, confirm payment procedures, forms to complete, and deposit dates. Mark them on your calendar!

9 months before your adventure:

- □ Begin pre-trip training or devotionals for both participants and leaders
- □ Schedule future team meetings leading up to trip
- Make participants aware of passport and vaccination requirements
- Begin fundraising (Check out our handy Fundraising Ideas page)

6 months before your adventure:

- □ Begin educating participants about the culture and customs in the area where you'll serve
- □ Remind participants to complete passport and vaccination requirements
- □ Purchase travel insurance
- $\hfill\square$ Meet with leaders separately to explain their roles
- □ Book plane tickets
- 3 months before your adventure:
- By this point, everyone should have all their vaccines and their passport—but double-check

- Distribute necessary forms to participants (release forms, background checks, etc.)
- □ Begin meeting monthly to address cultural training and answer questions

1 month before your adventure:

- □ Arrange transportation to airport
- □ Share packing and supplies list with participants
- □ Buy supplies your group needs for the trip
- Make two photocopies of everyone's passport and forms. Leave a copy in the church office and take a copy with you

1 week before your adventure:

- □ Review custom and culture training
- □ Hold a final team meeting to answer questions and review final details
- □ Have a "prep day" to prepare and pack supplies

Day of your adventure!:

- □ Set meeting time one hour before you need to leave
- □ Check that everyone has their passport and a photocopy of their passport
- □ Make sure parents have location information and phone number where you can be reached
- \Box Take a picture of your team
- \Box Pray for the trip ahead
- □ Make sure all luggage is tagged and labeled



PERSONAL NOTES AND REMINDERS

