



North Country Mission of Hope

Working Together to Improve Lives

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Fourteen Commandments for Going on an Overseas Mission Trip

These were not found on top of Mount Sinai, and they were not written on gold tablets. However, they were compiled and written by Bruce Carr based on personal experiences in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Nicaragua and on advice from many people who have had other mission trip experiences. It is assumed that most people reading this are American and have a Christian or other spiritual motivation.

- I. **Thou shalt go with a positive attitude.** Try to avoid complaints and anything else that could lead to arguments or dissension within the group.
- II. **Thou shalt realize that this is a mission service trip in which you seek to serve God through service with others to the best of your ability.** Frankly, one of the most unpleasant situations is when some people who are working their hearts out turn and around and see other very healthy and able bodied group members who are doing nothing- or as little as possible. Of course, everyone gets tired and sometimes a brief illness may keep you from working. That's understandable, but always try to do your best. This is a service and work oriented trip, not a luxury or sunbathing cruise.
- III. **Thou shalt stay together and not go wandering off on your own without the knowledge of one of the main group leaders and at least one other person to accompany you.** We do not want anyone to get lost, be the victim of a random criminal act, or have any other misfortune.
- IV. **Thou shalt not delay group activities by being late when we are going someplace or meeting.** It is unfair to make everyone else have to wait for you.
- V. **Thou shalt not leave valuables unattended or get into other situations that could invite theft.** Fanny packs (or something similar to wear) are safer than purses or even backpacks. You definitely need to bring and wear a fanny pack for most of your money, passport copy, hand sanitizer and other needed items. It is also recommended that you have a waterproof pouch to place the copy of the passport.
- VI. **Thou shalt act as though cleanliness is next to Godliness when it comes to possible health hazards from contamination.** Don't even *think* of drinking tap water or brushing your teeth with it; safe bottled water will be available at all times. Always carry waterless hand sanitizer to clean your hands immediately before using the bathroom and/or eating. Dirty hands touching your mouth can invite illness.

- VII. Thou shalt always remember to practice basic health and first aid principles.** Use mosquito repellent with the recommended DEET content to protect against both nuisance mosquitoes and those that carry malaria and/or dengue fever. Dengue can cause serious illness- even death, and preventative immunization is not available. Sunscreen should be used at all times when the sun is out. Always carry a disinfectant such as Neosporin and use it anytime you cut or scrape your skin. Check with a medical care professional if you have any questions about any of these or related matters. See a travel medical professional for appropriate immunizations before your trip.
- VIII. Thou shalt always practice safety regarding vehicles.** Unfortunately, many overseas drivers- whether in a car, a truck or bus or van, tend to drive much more wildly than we are used to here in the United States. Trip volunteers sometimes drop their usual caution. Vehicle accidents cause more mission trip deaths than anything else. You can never be too careful in looking out for the unexpected.
- IX. Thou shalt not forget to practice caution and accident avoidance behavior around any worksites.** It is so easy to get a dislocated finger, twist an ankle, twist a ligament or much worse. Be especially careful when walking at night, and bring flashlights.
- X. Thou shalt check your insurance coverage.** Special group mission trip insurance to cover such things as air ambulance (if necessary for getting appropriate medical care) definitely should be obtained before your trip. Most trip policies only cover for accidents, death benefits and theft – but not for illness. Be sure that you are covered with your own insurance for illness. If you have a health insurance policy, don't assume it will automatically cover you on an overseas trip. Check it out!
- XI. Thou shalt respect the privacy of all group members.** In some instances, men and women may be staying in closer proximity to each other than you are used to doing in the U.S. and sometimes it may be necessary to use common bathroom facilities. Be care not to accidentally cause embarrassment to yourself or anyone else on the trip.
- XII. Thou shalt remember that you are guest in someone else's church, town, village or country.** Don't think that being an American from a more materially blessed culture makes you in any way better or smarter than your hosts. Respect their laws and customs and seek to learn from them as they seek to learn from you and your group. Realize that some words and forms of non verbal communication that may be friendly in American culture can have opposite meanings in other ones. Remember, that as an American, you are very conspicuous in places like your overseas host churches and neighborhoods around them. Don't do anything that might cause embarrassment to your hosts or to the Mission.
- XIII. Thou shalt not forget that your purpose is to glorify God and respect all persons through all of your actions.** Prayer, prayer and journaling are the three most essential elements for your success.
- XIV. Thou shalt expect to have a wonderful, memorable and life changing experience that you will always appreciate.** Doing whatever you can in advance to learn about the country where you are going and picking up a few basic words and phrases of their language will make your trip even more meaningful and productive. Feel free to contact trip leaders or people who have been on previous trips to ask questions.

Adapted from Bruce Carl's book on Helping Overseas Directory.