

Planning an International Field Trip

Step 1. Choose a location

Brainstorm some ideas of where you'd like to go and what you'd like to learn there. Research (library, online) to find out what educational activities are available. Maybe there's a famous landmark to see, a special event to attend, or even a missionary family or ministry to visit.

Step 2. Decide who (how many) are going

This may actually come after #4. Cost is a good definer of participants.



Step 3. Choose a date

I recommend picking several possible dates that fit your family's work and activity schedules. Then you can research prices (they change seasonally) and allow that to affect your final date decision. For instance resorts in the Caribbean often have lower rates in the winter non-holiday times and higher rates during summer vacation.

Step 4. Set a budget

Here are some suggestions for things to include in your budget:

- Passport costs - research the passport/visa requirements for entry and exit of the country you will visit. Some countries (like Belize) require you to pay for the privilege of visiting by charging visa or exit fees.
- Travel - airfare, luggage fees, ground transportation on site, airport parking, ferry tickets, etc. This would be any expected costs for physically moving you from place to place on your trip.
- Lodging - don't assume that a resort is always your best option. Research the smaller, mom and pop places too, read the reviews. Finding a great place to stay can make or break the experience.
- Meal allowance - how long will you be gone multiplied by 3 meals a day, generally planning to spend more for dinner than breakfast or lunch.
- Communications - will you have to buy a cell phone or a special calling plan to communicate while there? internet fees at the hotels, etc.
- Activity fees - tours, concert tickets, museum entrance fees, boat trips, bus tours, etc.
- Souvenirs - how much do you expect to spend on t-shirts, souvenirs and memorabilia?
- Misc. fees - foreign ATM fees (*be sure to let your bank know the dates and countries of your travel so they don't freeze your card during the trip.)
- Clothing - will you need special clothing for the climate of your location?
- Misc. expenses - anything else you can think of
- Emergency fund - It is good to always have a couple hundred dollars buffer for when the unexpected happens (and it will).

Step 5. Get your passports and papers in line

Make sure they are up to date and will cover you for the dates of the trip. Do you need birth certificates and/or notarized letters for travel from the parent/guardian of any of the minor participants?

Step 6. Buy your tickets and make your reservations

Shop around. Check with the local travel agency and do your own homework/comparisons online. Maybe even name your own price on Priceline.com. There are deals to be had if you look for them.

Step 7. Do your homework

Study, research, read, watch videos, find out all you can about where you are going. It will make the trip much more meaningful if you have a base of knowledge before you arrive. Plan out what you want to do, see, learn while there.

Step 8. Pack

Don't forget things like sunscreen, scuba gear, earmuffs & mittens (depending on your destination). Pack a journal for each participant and schedule a time each day for journaling about your trip, it will help you process what you are learning, help you remember what you did, saw, learned, and be a great life-time souvenir of the experience. Keep in mind how much luggage you can take/pull through the airport comfortably, and that you *always* have more to bring home than you took with you.

Step 9. Enjoy

No matter how well planned a trip or event, things happen. Plan ahead of time to be flexible and enjoy the experience.

Helpful sites:

- ListPlanIt.com - a helpful site with ready made lists for travel: planning, budgeting, packing, sight-seeing and more!
- TripAdvisor.com - hundreds of search options and a good place to find current reviews on destinations and lodging. Don't forget to write a review yourself once you get back from your trip
- travel.stat.gov - A US State Department site with information on international travel, passports, laws, policies, living abroad, etc.
- USPS.com - the United States Postal Service passport application/renewal services. Check the website for more information or to contact your local USPS office.
- Wunderground.com - an up to the minute worldwide weather tracker, so you can pack without wondering.