

Trip Leader Best Practices Guide

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Best Practices

Empowering Trip Leaders

- You have the keys to the kingdom, so to speak! As the university representative leading this trip, you and your co-leader(s) have been given authority to make decisions for the entire group. While you may look to the tour guides, field workers, or others hosting your group on the ground for wisdom and guidance, you ultimately are at liberty to make any final decisions. However, we ask that you take into consideration the advice given by those more familiar with the culture than you. This will require using both common sense and discernment, as you consider what is safest, smartest, and best for yourself, your co-leader(s), and your students. If you and your co-leader have discussed a situation and are still not sure how to proceed, you are welcome to call the LU Send Logistics Hotline (434-414-1441). Below are scenarios we've encountered on previous trips:
- The tour guide or field workers invite the group out for a drink that night, or insist that they try the wine at dinner. You are at liberty to remind them that the trip has a no-alcohol policy, even if that would be considered culturally offensive.
- You return to D.C. and instead of a mini-bus, a 15-passenger van is sent. There is no way all the luggage and passengers will fit safely inside the vehicle. You can make the decision to rent an additional vehicle at the airport to drive back to Lynchburg. This expense would go on your p-card and will be approved during the reconciling process.
- A student has been disrespectful, not willing to submit to authority, and continues to break rules laid out for him/her. You have had several conversations with him/her, but nothing has improved, and you are only half-way through the trip. You can make the decision to send that student home early. Call the LU Send Logistics Hotline (434-414-1441) for advice on how to handle this situation.

Leading by Example

- The most effective way for students to learn how to interact with each other, with locals, and with those hosting the group, is to watch their trip leaders. As mentors on this trip, you are leading by example in how you approach the culture, those within it, the field workers, the tour guides, bus drivers, and those within your own group. International travel can bring about unanticipated stress, and so the better you react to, and handle this stress, the better your students will be able to do so. *How can you lead by example?*
 - Being polite to servers, public transportation workers, tourist site employees, etc.
 - Extending grace and kindness to those in the group who may be challenging
 - Allowing the field workers, tour guides, or hosts to be the culture and engagement experts
 - Engaging with locals when appropriate to learn more about their culture
 - Being the first one to engage during the service activities
 - Serving those on the trip by carrying luggage, giving up your seat, waiting for a slow walker, opening the door for others, offering to pray with them

Coaching Students

- Coach students beforehand in these general travel best practices, then remind them throughout the trip. Also, make sure that you – as the team leader – are setting the example in all of these areas. If you find yourself not sure of how to address an issue with a student, the “sandwich” method can be used in almost any situation: (1) Affirm, (2) Correct, Constructive Criticism, (3) Affirm.

Check Your Space

- Make a habit of checking your personal space before you leave an area, hotel, or airplane seat. Physically look to make sure that you have your most important belongings with you before you leave a space.

Phones

- Unless students buy an international phone plan, they will only be able to use most of their cell phone capabilities when on Wi-Fi. Encourage students to limit phone use to team “resting” times (typically at the hotel at night). Even when using phones to take pictures, encourage them to be present in the moment.
- Many countries offer better talk and data rates by purchasing/installing country-specific sim cards. Purchasing these with cash will ensure you are not inadvertently registering for/obligating yourself to a plan.
- [WhatsApp](#) offers an encrypted group chat feature which works internationally and will also work in wifi-only zones. LU Send highly recommends sending a WhatsApp link to all trip participants prior to departure.

FAT

- Remind students to be FAT (Flexible, Adaptable, & Teachable). There will be many moments on the trip where things will not go as planned, and it is important for students to maintain a good attitude and positive outlook. Always ask “what can I learn?” in the midst of these situations and use it as an opportunity to teach students about the culture or customs.

Packing

- LU Send provides students with a packing list and guidelines. Remind students that they will be transporting their own luggage through the airport, on and off transportation, and at the hotel. Help them keep their packing realistic in that re-wearing items is normal and acceptable. If you are familiar with the location(s) of the trip and have recommendations, please feel free to share with your students. Inform students of what the weather will be like and coach them on the amount of walking and amount of time in transit that they will have.

Meeting Students

- When meeting students at the airport, make sure to give them specific directions as to where to meet (instead of “ticket counter” say “Delta ticket counter by door 4”), and try to give them a specific description of what you will be wearing. Make sure that you have all of the student’s contact information and have online students send you a picture of themselves before the trip.

Passport Checks

- In order to ensure that all passports are accounted for, it is beneficial to do “visual passport checks” throughout the trip. During transit times, ask students to physically put their hand on their passport when doing a passport check. Even if they think they know where it is, tell them to locate it and it is best to request they show it to you. Leaders passports should also be checked and don’t forget to include yourself.
- While in country, their passport should be kept in a safe place in their suitcase and they will carry a copy of their passport on them at all times. As the team leader, you will also have a copy of each passport. Team leaders are allowed to take up passports for the duration of the trip, but it is recommended to carefully think through your itinerary and how this might inhibit students not carrying their passports personally (i.e. regular passport checks in air or land transit). As well, think through how this trip can be a learning experience for the students in regards to responsibility.

Keeping Records

- Make it a practice to keep notes on issues that may arise during your trip. This will help on the back end in debriefing the location, tour company, service hots, etc. and serve as written records in regards to injuries or emergencies. Some incidents will need to be re-entered into Terra Dotta upon return, such as Title 9 incidents. Examples include:
 - Title 9 incidents
 - Disrespect or disobedience on the part of a student
 - Service activities and/or hosts that may not meet expectations or align with LU doctrine
 - Injury or illness
 - Emergencies (theft, passport lost, national emergency)
 - Issues with the tour company or tour director

Cell Phone Instructions (LU)

- Leaders are asked to activate international service on their personal cell phone. This service charge will be reimbursed by LU Send after the trip, **up to \$100 total**. Additional funds can be budgeted within the trip cost; however, this is generally discouraged since trip leaders can opt to receive per diem support that is already factored in to the trip’s budget for incidental and food cost.
- This trip leader needs to present their cell phone bill for the month prior to departure and the month of departure.
- If the team is splitting into tracks on various days, a leader from each track should always be reachable by cell phone.

Safety and Security

STEP

- LU Send has enrolled all American travelers on your trip in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program with the U.S. State Department. This program allows U.S. citizens and nationals traveling abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Keeping Track of Students

- Use the cluster system (groups of 4-6 with a cluster leader), buddy system or the count off system when in transit. If you are using the buddy system, friends and roommates should not be buddies as they have a tendency to disappear together.
- Have all the contact information you need on you at all times (local addresses, numbers, embassy, etc.).
- Ensure the students also carry any contact information they may need. Many hotels provide cards with their address and phone number.
- Instruct students on how to get back to your hotel or team meeting place if they get lost.
- Have a strategy in place if a student gets separated from the group when taking public transportation.
- Have an emergency plan in place and make sure your students are aware of this plan.

Situational Awareness

- Keep your voice level low as it attracts attention. Even what is considered a normal volume for Americans is considered loud in most other cultures.
- Keep your belongings in front of you (especially during transit), and bring a bag that you can hold in front of you. If you have a backpack, put it in front of you in high traffic areas and do not keep anything in your back pockets. This will help you to avoid pick pocketing.
- Be cautious of the words you use and assume everyone in close proximity can speak English and may be listening to your conversations. Avoid topics such as politics, mission terms, and names of mission organizations.
- Prepare an STS (short truthful statement) of the purpose of your trip. Create a few ideas of things students can say and coach students through this as they will use it at the airport and throughout the trip.

Social Media

- Do not allow the public posting of live updates (location, video, etc.) on social media. Safe-guarding your whereabouts ensures your group cannot be targeted via social media.
- Practice social media etiquette when posting pictures of your group on social media. Always ask others if they mind being included in these posts.
- When posting on social media, be cautious and know that the people you meet while on your trip can see what you post about their home country and culture. Be sensitive to

the culture and what things are and aren't appropriate to post or take pictures of. When in doubt, always ask a field host or tour guide if it is ok to post about a particular location or event.

- Have students wait until the end of the day to post pictures or updates. This ensures you have left those specific sites and locations.
- Most LU Send trips include a trip-branded Google Photos link. Please encourage students to post photos/videos/video testimonials in that link for use by LU Send, and to be enjoyed by one another.
- Many LU Send trip leaders have enjoyed opening a closed/private Facebook Group for students to communicate both before and after a trip.

Emergency Protocol

Establishing Emergency Protocol

Note: The most up to date Emergency Response Plan will be hosted on your Terra Dotta application to review (connect with your Trip Coordinator for assistance).

The following Emergency Protocol is in place for LU Send international trips:

Step 1: Contain the situation (ensure health and safety of all the travelers).

Step 2: Contact local authorities and US Embassy/Consulate if needed.

Step 3: Connect with the Emergency Contact at 434-658-7363 (434-6LU-SEND).

Step 4: Emergency Contact will notify the Crisis Management Team established at the University.

Step 5: The Crisis Management Team will contact senior leadership of the University as needed as well as supporting departments/vendors/clients.

Step 6: After a decision has been made regarding the trip and the situation is resolved, the Crisis. Management Team will debrief with a full summary of incident and the resolution.

In light of an Urgent Emergency where Cell/Wi-Fi Connect is disabled

If there is a natural disaster, or a situation arises where there is no possible way to make contact with the Emergency Contact via cell or Wi-Fi capabilities please do the following:

Step 1: Assess the situation (ensuring health and safety of all the travelers).

**Whether to stay put or move is the primary objective in this situation*

Step 2: Go to the US Embassy/Consulate when able.

**If you are unable to go to the US Embassy, make your way to the UN or Allied Embassies when able.*

Step 3: Connect with the Emergency Contact at 434-658-7363 (434-6LU-SEND) when able.

Step 4: Emergency Contact will notify the Crisis Management Team established at the University.

Step 5: After a decision has been made regarding the trip and the situation is resolved, the Crisis Management Team will debrief with a full summary of incident and the resolution.

In light of a Non-Urgent Emergency

Step 1: Contain the situation (ensure health and safety of all the travelers).

Step 2: Connect with the Emergency Contact at 434-658-7363 (434-6LU-SEND).

Step 3: Emergency Contact will connect with leadership of the University as needed, as well as supporting departments/vendors/clients.

Step 4: After situation is resolved and trip continues as normal, the Emergency Contact is to report with Crisis Management Team with a full summary of incident and the resolution.

****In the event that you must take a student to the hospital, your in-country host/guide will be able to assist you with this process. The international travel insurance will cover in-country medical needs, but most hospitals or healthcare facilities will only accept cash/card for payment. These expenses will be filed with insurance upon return, so please keep all receipts from a medical visit.*

Emergency Preparedness

- Have the various emergency contact phone numbers readily available for the duration of your trip. This includes your co-leaders, your in-country hosts/tour guides, and the LU Send Emergency Contact. You will be provided with local U.S. Embassy information including addresses and phone number.
- Establish a meeting place with your team should you get split up or a person gets separated from your group. While in country this could be as simple as meeting back at the hotel or your airport gate if in transit.
- LU Send will provide you with emergency funds, in the case that your p-card will not work. If your costs exceed the designated supply, contact the LU Send Logistics Hotline (434-414-1441) for a wire transfer.
- Avoid crowds or demonstrations. As foreigners, your limited knowledge of the culture and language puts you at risk and possibly in harm's way.

- Take care of the team as a whole in an emergency. If the emergency situation is only happening with one student, do not leave the rest of the team alone. Instead, send one team leader with the student while the other stays with the rest of the team.

Debriefing

Overview

- Debriefing with students on a regular basis during your trip helps them to “make sense” of their experiences. Although students enter these trips with a vast array of travel experience, and may be experienced in navigating cultural challenges, it is still helpful to hold group debriefs. This allows students to talk about their experiences thus far, and how they may be experiencing frustration, confusion, excitement, etc. Guiding them through a time of intentional reflection may help to alleviate culture shock, thus allowing them to experience the remainder of the trip with an open mind. Plan for both group debrief during your trip, as well as, personal times of reflection.

Types of Debriefing

- **Academic** - Faculty members may use times of debrief to help students connect their in-country experiences with specific academic content. The more opportunities you give students to understand and apply what they are seeing and experiencing to what they are learning in your class, allows for greater transfer of knowledge in the future.
- **Itinerary/Tour Schedule Reflection** - Trip leaders can use times of debrief to walk students through their cultural site visits (i.e. museums, historical sites, theatre performance, etc.), or other experiences (i.e. public transit, restaurants, people, architecture, etc.). This allows students to discuss their thoughts on the culture thus far, ask questions, and make inferences about the culture. It also allows them an outlet to voice concerns, challenges, or even appreciation about the culture. Encourage students to compare what they are experiencing with what they already know, but to understand Cultural Intelligence means understanding, accepting, and working within the reality that cultures are different, not wrong or right.
- **Cultural Engagement** - Your group’s opportunities to engage with the culture, from organic conversations with the waiter, to standing next to someone on the train, to the pre-arranged service activities, will allow them a deeper insight into that culture. As students engage with the culture at this personal level, they will, most of the time, be more greatly impacted. Use both group debriefing and personal reflection to allow students to process through how these experiences affected them.
- **Asking simple questions** - “Tell me some of your specific experiences today,” “What kind of conversations did you have? What did you learn?” “What did you think about how the local people _____?” “How did today’s service/engagement activity reveal another layer of this culture?” “How will this affect you in the next few days?”
- Pray as a group for God to reveal to you a deeper understanding and love for the culture and the people through continued engagement opportunities. Pray for open doors to share about the hope that lies within you! 1 Peter 3:14-16.

- Ask for volunteers to lead devotionals/prayer time. Feel free to offer opportunities for same-gender one-on-one discipleship either personally or with an LU Shepherd.
- Be aware the stress of travel/culture shock can trigger psychological issues in those predisposed. Feel free to request assistance when dealing with any such challenges that may arise.

How To

- **Personal vs. practical debriefing** - Debriefing can serve two purposes – personal and practical. Personal debriefing allows students to make sense of their experiences, reconcile cultural differences, to alleviate culture shock, and to approach the culture with a more open mind. Practical debriefing involves communicating necessary information, such as itinerary changes, next-day plans, issues with group dynamics, emergency protocol, etc. Group debriefing usually involves both.
- **Planned vs spontaneous debriefing** - Debriefing can take two forms – planned and spontaneous. Planned debriefing is when you have set aside time for the group as a whole, or students individually, to process through their experiences. Spontaneous debriefing involves utilizing other opportunities to talk to the group as a whole, or to students individually. This can be done as you're waiting for the train, sitting down to dinner, walking to your next site, or on the tour bus. Take advantage of these times to connect with your group.
- **Active assessment** - Throughout your trip, take mental notes of how students are reacting to the culture, each other, the field hosts, etc. Use these to guide your planned or spontaneous debriefs. For example, you notice that students are uncomfortable with the service project working with refugees. Approach these students individually to ask how they're doing, or use the group debrief time later to let them know you noticed some hesitancy that day. Be actively assessing your group's interactions with each other and with the culture.
- **After the trip** - We encourage all trips to have a team reunion within two months of the trip's return. During this time, allow for discussion of how everyone has adjusted since returning. It is absolutely normal for those who have traveled abroad to experience reverse culture – readapting to the realities of the home culture. Ask what has been most challenging, how they are approaching those challenges, how the trip has impacted their desire for future cross-cultural interactions, and how the group can be supportive.

Appendix I

Additional Resource: Traveler Profiles

Your trip will bring with it many different types of travelers. Below are some of the most common types LU Send has seen, with their strengths and weaknesses, and how you can relate to each. In most situations, you can use the “sandwich” method when addressing an issue with a student: (1) Affirm, (2) Correct/Constructive Criticism, (3) Affirm.

The Academic – This student is purely on the trip to learn and earn academic credit.

- *Strengths* – Invested in learning experiences; open to academic discussions
- *Weaknesses* – May not be interested in non-academic experiences or sees them as trivial; may not be willing to engage with students who are not “academic.”
- *Pointers* – Encourage the student to consider how the cultural and service activities enhance the academics. Challenge him to integrate those experiences with the subject matter.

The Tourist – This student is purely on the trip to see the sights and experience a new culture. You may see them taking pictures more than you see them actually engaging with the academic or spiritual components of the trip.

- *Strengths* – Excited to be on the trip; lots of positive energy; will be open to almost any cultural experience.
- *Weaknesses* – May not practice situational awareness or common sense; too focused on taking pictures instead of taking in the moment. May view the local people as opportunities for pictures, instead of opportunities to know the culture more.
- *Pointers* – Ask the student what she is learning through the site-seeing. How would she explain the pictures taken to people back home? Encourage the student to listen to the tour guide, or commentary from the professor first, before taking pictures. She may only be in this place once, and will regret not experiencing the culture for all it has to offer.

The Missionary – This student is purely on the trip to serve and share the gospel with the local people.

- *Strengths* – Very motivated to engage with the culture; servant’s heart.
- *Weaknesses* – May not be sensitive to the local culture and appropriateness of sharing the gospel. May not listen to leadership (trip leaders, field workers, tour guide) regarding the do’s and don’ts of the trip and instead sees evangelism as superior.
- *Pointers* – Affirm the student’s desire to serve and be used by God. Remind her that others know the culture better and to listen to their guidance. As well, specific times of service/engagement have been set up for your group.

The “Experienced” Traveler – This is often your older online student that has a job, family, and plenty of life experience.

- *Strengths* – Life experience, maturity, can potentially aid in helping younger students feel included.

- *Weaknesses* – May not feel the “rules” apply to him, such as alcohol, staying in pairs, or curfew, because of age, and being an online student. Older students can also bring along different physical limitations that may impact the group’s mobility.
- *Pointers* – Always affirm the student’s presence on the trip! Be mindful of physical limitations or frustrations you may notice in the student and speak with him individually. Include the student as much as possible, even utilizing him if you feel he could help in some way, such as leading a debrief, or speaking to a specific site or experience. You never know what wealth of information that student could be!

The Maverick – This student prefers to fly solo. This could be a well-traveled student who doesn’t want to follow group travel protocol, or has/hasn’t traveled and is truly ignorant to her behavior.

- *Strengths* – Can have extensive travel experience, which means no coaching on your part; independent and self-sufficient.
- *Weaknesses* – May not listen to the leaders’ promptings or follow group travel protocol because of the time spent abroad. If this is an inexperienced traveler, she may feel her confidence getting around in her home country is transferable to other locations. As well, although this traveler may have extensive travel experience, it may not actually be beneficial, as past mistakes were never corrected or addressed.
- *Pointers* – Continue to remind the group, as a whole, that each travel experience is different and each country, city, airport, train station, etc. can have distinct ways of doing things. While prior travel experience can prove helpful, each student is part of a larger group in which every traveler is following the same protocol. Desiring to do “one’s own thing” can put the entire group in jeopardy.

The Recluse – This student seems to keep to himself, not really interacting with others in the group. You can’t necessarily tell what the student is thinking, as he is nonverbal.

- *Strengths* – Do not have to worry about disorderly conduct, or inappropriate interactions with locals. May simply be a quieter student who has an analytical mind.
- *Weaknesses* – The other students may feel awkward around him, as he does not make an attempt to interact. You also cannot tell what the student is thinking, which makes it hard to perceive if he is adjusting well.
- *Pointers* – Do not call out this student in front of the group! Interact with him on an individual basis, asking simple questions, like “What are you enjoying?” “Have you ever been anywhere like this before?” “What did you think about our meal?” Continue to show this student individual attention and include him in group things, even if he seems hesitant. Each student on your team is part of a group and needs to try his best to interact at a level with which they feel comfortable.

The Debater – This student can be argumentative for arguments sake, or may not respect authority. She has a question, challenge, or comment about almost everything that is communicated, whether it’s on a tour, or simply during your daily run-down of the day’s upcoming events.

- *Strengths* – She may bring up valid points pertaining to academic content, during group debriefing, or regarding other topics. At least she’s vocal!
- *Weaknesses* – She may be perceived by the group as disrespectful to authority, which can put your and your co-leader(s) ability to lead on display. She also may be wearing on the group, as she is always the first one to speak up and may control the conversation. The other students may tire of being around her.
- *Pointers* – If in a large group and she begins to debate, argue, etc., say that you would like to hear from other members of the group. If she persists, you or your co-leader can say you’d like to speak to her in person. Let her know that while you admire her confidence to vocalize her thoughts, you need her to remember that she is part of a larger group in which each traveler should be given the opportunity to speak. If she has been exhibiting highly disrespectful behavior, tell her that it will not be tolerated and that continued behavior could result in her missing out on activities or even being sent home.

The High Maintenance – This student can be anyone that may require more attention or specific attention as opposed to the rest of group. (i.e. the complainer, dietary needs, disabled, first-time traveler, the unaware, etc.).

- *Strengths* – Depending on the student’s needs, he could be a lesson in patience, grace, and kindness for the rest of the group. This trip could also be a wonderful learning experience for the student, especially a first-time traveler or the unaware.
- *Weaknesses* – Depending on the student’s needs, he could be very wearing on the group, especially if the needs are not vital to his well-being (i.e. not wanting to ride public transportation, food preferences vs. food allergies, complaining about everything, etc.).
- *Pointers* – Consider how vital the needs are – legitimate mobility issues vs. just tired from a lot of walking. Take note of how this student is affecting the rest of the group, and if the student should change his attitude, or if you should use this as an opportunity to grow patience and grace in the other group members. You may need to make adjustments, such as walking slow with a student who has limited mobility, making sure meals are available for those with allergies, or extending extra grace to the first-time traveler who asks a million questions. But, if a student is affecting the group negatively for illegitimate reasons, pull him aside and let him know that he is part of a larger group and his behavior affects everyone else’s experience. Warn him that continued behavior may warrant missing activities or even being sent home.

The Clique or Couple – These students do not interact with the rest of the group but stick to themselves in all settings.

- *Strengths* – They have preset traveling companions. You will not have to worry about them making friends on the trip. Where one is, the other(s) will be also.
- *Weaknesses* – These students could be perceived as “stuck up,” not caring about others in the group. Not desiring to interact with others on the trip could affect the overall group dynamic, especially when participating in a service or engagement project.

- *Pointers* – Take note of how other group members are acting around these students. If they seem concerned, frustrated, or are reacting negatively, first try to pull these students into interactions with other group members. Remind the entire group that the way everyone interacts with each other is a witness to those who encounter your group. If these students still break off from the group, pull them aside and ask that they make a better effort to be part of the group. This will help the overall group dynamic and may be an opportunity to meet others they may actually like! If there is a romantic interest between two trip participants, please ask them to be respectful of local customs and remind them “Liberty Way” will be enforced on the trip.

The Non-Disclosed – This student did not share important information prior to the trip and you have discovered it while in country (i.e. health concerns, religious preferences, eating disorder, sexual orientation/gender dysmorphia, etc.).

- *Strengths* – The student may need a safe space to disclose this information, and you could be that safe space.
- *Weaknesses* – Depending on the situation, this could potentially affect/compromise your group’s trip, especially in the case of a medical issue flaring up.
- *Pointers* – At the beginning of the trip, if not before, remind your entire group that their safety and well-being is your top priority. In order to lead well, you need any and all information that may be an issue, especially medical information. You will keep that information confidential when legally permitted to do so, and the students can feel free to approach any of the trip leaders in person with a concern. If the issue seems urgent, or you are not sure how to handle it, call the Emergency Contact at 1-434-6LU-SEND.