Each year, we ask our students how their Service Year went, what they would change, and what they would offer as advice to future students. Below is the advice about preparing for the international trip that we've collected over the years.

Before the International Trip

- “Pick up some basic language skills—even just a hello, how are you, what is your name, my name is...etc. “It was super sad to have little children jump onto my lap, and not even be able to ask their name or say thank you. It takes 3 minutes of forethought, but opens so many doors, and makes a huge difference to the villagers to simply know a few words of their language.”
- “Make sure that you understand that it is not a tourist trip. Get in the mindset that you are traveling to another country primarily to serve. If you have the intention of serving your heart out, you will have a more enjoyable experience overall.”
- “Don’t bring a lot of stuff to hand out at your site! My first year in Kenya, we brought candy, toys, and a lot of other American entities. By the end of the trip, the kids were more concerned with our things then the service we were doing.”
- “Leave your phone, computer, iPod, and anything that links you back to America at home. So many kids were on the wifi in Vietnam and it was a real bummer to see them on Instagram all the time instead of exploring the town.”
- “Less is more when traveling. I’ve gone on two Youthlinc trips and somehow both times I packed way too much. You can wear clothes again and again. Be careful what you pack when traveling because at times you haul your luggage around and it’s a pain when there's several bags that are maxed out on their weight. It's also important to get some background of the country you’re going to. Then you don't do anything inappropriate. A nice touch is learning basics of the language such as hello, goodbye, my name is...”
- “I have been on two Youthlinc trips and had two completely different experiences would say this: Read one book on the history or something that interests you about the country you are visiting. Soak in as much as you can about the place you will be traveling. It will make your experience much more meaningful and you will be able to relate with the people in country much easier.”
- “Get your passport as soon as possible. Bring snacks in your suitcase (case of fruit snacks, chewy bars, etc.). Bring your own pillow. Sunscreen and bug spray! Learn how to say thank you in the local language. Don’t depend on other people bringing something; just bring it. DO NOT over pack. Bring workout clothes, one leisure outfit, and one slightly dressy outfit. Open yourself up. Don’t think you know someone or something entirely because I guarantee it will change. Perspective is a big thing and it will rock your world once you are in country. It definitely made me look at the world in a different light. Make friends, work hard and don’t let the drama in. Let the small things go and do your best. Remember why you are there.”
- “Go in with a mind set of "How is service a two-way street?" The first part of service is the impact we have on those we are serving, but if that was the only reason to do service, then why send people abroad when there are communities to serve right here in Utah. The answer to this, is the second part of service is the impact it makes on us as individuals. We have so much to learn from those we serve.”
- “I talked with someone who was on the team the year before. And that really helped me because I got to understand the culture better and didn’t feel bad about asking for money and donations.”
- “Pack as light as you can, but as precisely as you can. Know what you absolutely can’t go without as well as what you want, but won’t necessarily need to bring (that being said, candy and snacks are the exception that may very well be a need more than a want!) Bring (modest) clothes that you wouldn’t mind leaving behind, as they make great donations at the end of the trip. It’s always a good idea to learn some of the history and language, but my advice is to also learn about the culture of poverty itself. It can help so much in the way you interact with the people there.”
- “Be prepared to work hard. Pack clothes you are not afraid to ruin or give away, bug spray, tennis shoes and snacks will be your best friends. Snacks especially. You will want them!”
Advice from Youthlinc Alums

International Service Preparation

“"The best and most important advice that I've learned from traveling anywhere is to not have a mind set of ‘This is so weird’ or ‘We would never do this in the US’ When you think this way, you miss out on so much love you could have for the culture! Embrace the differences and love your group, love the work you are doing, and love the people! And if you can't do that...fake it until you make it.”

“It is not realistic to think that you are going to be able to learn to speak the language in a year. This does not mean that you shouldn't try to learn anything. Both Youthlinc trips I have been on I have found it best to learn the simple phrases that can at least allow you to make a connection with someone, i.e. Hi, how are you, what's your name, etc. (You may also want to learn some practical things i.e. be careful, where's the bathroom, etc) Don't worry, the people there will still love you even if they don't understand you.”

“Coming to the country with a knowledge of the culture really enhanced my experience.”

“Come ready to work construction and in the hot heat. Bring Gatorade electrolyte packets to keep yourself hydrated. Do not forget to bring your journal and a pen. You will have a lot that you’ll want to write down and never forget.”

On the International Trip

“Try to go out into the community and make friends with as many people as you can. While it may feel more comfortable to only hang out with your Youthlinc team, you will have a much better experience if you embrace the community.”

“Live in the moment while you are at your international service site. The time goes by so quickly that you do not want to be focused on what is happening on Facebook in America but should be focused on the experiences you are having with your Youthlinc team and the community.”

“Enjoy every piece of what you experience in another country. The weather, the bugs, the animals, the people, all of it! Because as soon as you get home, you'll be missing that frog or tarantula that hung around outside your room door. It's a blessing to be going where you go!”

“Be flexible!!! Don't expect everything to go as planned because this is not realistic and really this becomes part of the fun. Also be ready to get your hands dirty and to sweat a lot. Immerse yourself in the culture there because this is the only way you will be able to better understand they way that the people live. It is an amazing experience to work and play alongside such beautiful people.”

“It is important to realize that your international trip is a once in a lifetime experience. You have those two weeks, and then your time in country is over. With that being said, appreciate every moment that you have, and recognize the beauty of your surroundings and the people you are with!”

“Get to know the people you’re serving. They are some of the most wonderful relationships you will ever make! I can honestly say I fell in love with the people and culture of the people we served. It should be a goal for everyone going to come back home changed, whether it was because you changed someone’s life and it felt awesome or because (more likely) they changed your life.”

“Donations are always good to bring, but you are also going to be packing on suitcase for two weeks in a place where you can't just go buy something you forgot. You will also be packing everything for your lessons in that same suitcase. So, whatever extra room you have definitely bring donations, but don't expect lots of extra room. You may also be able to donate things that you used on the trip (boots, jackets, etc.) at the end of the trip at some sites.”

“Just be excited and most of all be flexible. There is no way to anticipate all the twists and turns along the road. Anticipate that things will change and not always go according to plan. If you can accept this and go with the flow, you'll enjoy every minute.”

“Enjoy the moment. It will be over faster than you think and I guarantee you will want to go back. Don't spend all your time taking pictures, but making memories instead. Believe me, those memories will last just as long as a picture will.”