

FAQ

Do I need a Visa?

Traveling to South Africa you will not need a visa. You will, however, need to make sure you have a current passport with at least six months validity from the time you return home.

Will my electronics work in South Africa?

Electricity in South Africa is 220 Volts, so if you choose to bring your electronics with you, you will need both a plug in adapter and a transformer to use them. Some of your regular electronic items already have a transformer built in to them, such as a laptop computer. These items list on the plug if you are able to use them at 220 Volts. We have noticed recurring problems with straighteners and hair dryers burning out even with these things. We have South African hair dryers for team use but you may wish to plan an alternative hair style if you normally use your straightener.

Can I use my debit/credit card in South Africa?

You can use your debit/credit cards in South Africa, however, it is always a good idea to notify your bank or credit card company that you will be traveling. This will ensure they don't put a hold on your cards due to suspicions of fraud.

What is my money worth in South Africa?

South African currency is the Rand. One US Dollar is equal to approximately 7 Rand.

How much money should I bring?

The trip tuition covers most expenses while on your trip, although, it does **not** cover meals on your travel days, snacks when traveling, souvenirs, internet and phone costs, and fees to acquire a passport. It would be a good idea to figure about \$10 per meal in the airport and then include the cost of anything extra you may want to purchase. A lot of people bring at least \$150 to \$200 spending money but it varies quite a bit depending on souvenirs you plan to purchase.

Is everyone who applies accepted?

There are few instances that a trip application will be denied, however BMI does reserve the right to deny any applicant. There could be several reasons a trip application would be denied, such as, the team you signed up for is already full, there was a reason for concern on your background check, you don't meet the medical requirements for the trip, etc. If for any reason your application has been denied you will receive a letter from the BMI team, discussing the reasoning behind the decision, all decisions will be final.

Does BMI screen its volunteers?

BMI now processes a background screening on all persons who wish to volunteer with our ministry. Conducting a background check is to ensure the safety of the staff and any other volunteer. Costs for this is included in your trip tuition.

What if I cancel my trip?

All trip tuition payments and donations received by Blessman Ministries are non-refundable. Even if the funds received are in excess to the fees incurred by Blessman Ministries, the funds will be used for other ministry expenses. Please see our trip tuition policy for more details and exceptions.

Can BMI cancel a mission trip?

It is a rare occurrence that Blessman Ministries would cancel a trip, however, we do reserve the right to cancel any trip at any time. Cancelling a trip would be due to unforeseen complications or if the safety of the team would be jeopardized in any way. If this were to happen team members would be notified, and would be given the option to join another team.

Could I extend my stay to add on a vacation or site seeing?

We have had several trip participants stay longer than the actual mission trip for personal reasons. Please note that if you stay longer for personal leisure you are responsible for covering all expenses after the mission trip is completed, including travel insurance, airfare differences, meals etc. All arrangements for site seeing are solely your responsibility and cannot be directly arranged by our office. Because a side vacation is not a ministry experience, payments must be made directly to those making the arrangements for you (i.e., a travel agent). If you need help knowing who to contact to make arrangements for side trips, we can give you contact information for a travel agent in South Africa.

Are scholarships available?

BMI does not offer trip scholarships, however, if you need help raising your funds please feel free to ask for sample fundraising letters.

What are the accommodations like?

We cannot guarantee five star lodgings, however, we will provide a safe and adequate place for each of our teams to stay. Individual lodgings are based on location and outreach. Accommodations will be safe, but we can't always guarantee the level of comfort. Each team stays at our ministry headquarters following their outreach days. Our Thompson Ministry Campus is where our long term ambassadors and team members stay during that time. It consists of three two bedroom, two story apartments. Team members can expect to sleep on a twin size bunk bed in this housing. Please visit our website for photos.

What types of gifts should I bring?

We do discourage the giving of gifts or handouts while on a BMI trip. Our real goal is to help the people of South Africa get on their feet and not make them become dependent on individuals or organizations. Additionally, handing anything out in our clinics or in public can cause crowd control problems because everyone will want what you're giving away. If you would like to donate gifts to the work we are doing in South Africa we are happy to collect donations at our US office, this will ensure all gifts are collected and sent together.

Can I bring my computer or cell phone?

You can bring things such as your computer or cell phone, please keep in mind that we are not responsible for any lost or stolen items and bringing any unnecessary valuables puts you at a higher risk of loss or damage. Unless you have an international cell phone plan or option, your cell phone will not work out of the U. S. Also, please remember that you are going to serve the people of South Africa and anything that would distract you from receiving a blessing should be left at home.

What can my church collect to bring with our team?

The needs in South Africa are ever changing, if your church would like to collect an item for the work we are doing please contact our US office and we can guide you on what specific needs there are. A few ongoing things are hand sewn eyeglass cases, gently used cotton T-shirts to be cut into eyeglass cleaning cloths, and hygienic items like tooth paste, tooth brushes, and small soaps.

What shots are necessary to go to South Africa?

You will need to be up to date on any immunizations that are necessary at home, as well as a current tetanus shot. It is always a good idea to consult your own health care professional when traveling outside the country.

Do I need Malaria medication?

Most areas that we work in are Malaria free. If Malaria is a risk where we will be traveling you will be notified so you can get the proper prophylactics/preventatives. If prophylactics/preventatives are needed you can easily acquire these through your personal health care provider.

What is a typical day like?

Please see our typical schedule in your team member manual.

Is it dangerous?

As with any mission trip there are risks involved, due to location, travel, and the overall difference in culture. Blessman Ministries will strive to ensure that each team member's safety is valued and taken into consideration, please notify a BMI staff member if you feel your safety is being compromised.

I am not a medical professional. What could I do on a trip?

You don't have to be a medical professional to join us on a trip. There will be a wide range of opportunities while on your trip, including but not limited to, conducting vision clinics, talking with a child about the risks of HIV/AIDS, or simply praying with an individual. We equip all team members with the things they will need to know to effectively minister while on their trip.

What if I get sick or injured during my trip?

From time to time, we do have a team member who falls ill or injures him/herself in some way. Our staff will get you the care you need for your specific situation. Each team member is given travel medical insurance that includes emergency evacuation to the nearest adequate medical facility if necessary. Our president, Dr. Jim Blessman, is on almost every outreach and will be available to assist anyone who is sick or injured in getting proper care or treatment.

Is internet or telephone communication available for team members?

Internet and phone communication is available in South Africa. Phone cards are available upon arrival in South Africa or can be purchased from Wal-Mart here in the U.S. We ask that team members do not place any calls without using a calling card. Internet can be used as time allows at internet cafés. Internet is available at the ministry campus, however, it is quite expensive and is restricted to staff or long term worker use only.

What is the weather like?

The seasons in South Africa are opposite of the seasons in the United States, summer (mid-October to mid-February), fall (mid-February to mid-April), winter (May to July), spring (August to mid-October) If you would like more specific information on temperatures during your trip you can visit, www.theweatherchannel.com.

I am uncomfortable sharing my faith or talking about HIV/AIDS with children. Is there any way I can do something else?

It is not uncommon for people to be a bit uncomfortable sharing their faith for the first time or sharing with school children about HIV/AIDS. We have found some great resources to help you know what to say and resources to use. One of those resources is the called the AIDS Cube. It is a square, cardboard cube that has photos to help you educate the student you're speaking to on AIDS. Many team members found it to be a great tool and after speaking with one or two children their fears or uneasiness was gone. Another resource we use is called the Book of Hope. It is the first four gospels written in a language kids can understand and is formatting like a somewhat comic book. If you still feel uneasy, make an appointment to speak with someone at our office. We can help you determine if there is a role you're comfortable with and if these mission trips are right for you.