

It's a Jungle Out There

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Imagine flying two hours in a small Cessna plane that only seats four people and looking out the window and seeing green, just green. The experience is similar to flying over the ocean; you can't see where the forest started or where it is going to end. The thick foliage looks like waves of water over the vast South American soil. Then, being terrified of heights, you think about how if this tiny plane suddenly dropped ten thousand feet, you would be in the middle of *nowhere* and that is exactly where I was heading.

Last April I had the privilege of visiting my brother while he was a student missionary in Guyana. While I was in the tiny village of Parima I recalled why I think it is so important for our young people to get involved in missionary projects and trips.

I think it is essential that young people learn about and experience different cultures around the world. Too many people have inaccurate views of other nations because they have never left North America and only believe what they hear from friends or see on TV. When students are submerged into another culture it helps them to appreciate diversity and learn more about the many different kinds of people God has created. Most young people are awestruck when they first visit a third world country. I clearly remember my first third world airport experience, I was 15. I remember walking off the plane (no there aren't any fancy terminal gates) onto the tarmac. The first thing to hit me was the wave of heat and humidity. I was travelling from Canada where there was snow to a country where it was nearly 30°C. I walked into the airport to collect my baggage. Soon I found out that it is a good idea to pack essentials in your carry-on baggage because luggage collection was not as fast or efficient as I had come to expect. Most of us were fortunate enough to get our belongings, however one of the students I was travelling with found out that their bag had been sent to Hawaii. As we left the airport I became terrified when I looked around to see several armed guards in front of the airport and they were not armed with small handguns, these were full sized rifles. My journey had just begun.

When you wake up at 6:00 a.m. in the morning and walk to the outhouse and then to the cold outdoor shower, you can't help but appreciate warm indoor plumbing. Breakfast consists of the fruit you helped pick yesterday and rice cooked over an open fire. Then the work begins. For some students a mission trip is the first time they have ever had to do hard manual labour. After four hours of hard work in the scorching sun, rice and beans looks surprisingly good. Then back to work for another four hours and more rice and beans for supper. After two weeks of rice and beans at nearly every meal even fast food sounds very appealing. However, the day is not over yet, now you get to crawl into your sleeping bag on a wooden floor for your much needed rest. Life in Canada doesn't seem so bad now does it? Sometimes all it takes is seeing how much you really have to realize how much you can give.

When students return from mission trips, the most common attitude is gratefulness. Students finally realize just how fortunate they are. Suddenly mango body wash IS a

luxury. Encourage every student you know to get involved with mission work, it not only changes the lives of those they help, it also changes them.