



After the Trip: Unpacking Your Crosscultural Experience
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“Never before in our history have so many Americans taken international short-term mission trips. In the moment they feel transformative, but often the power of these crosscultural experiences fades away within weeks of returning home. Cory Trenda has led dozens of visits to the poorest places in the world over the past thirty years, and he knows from personal experience that often the most important work God does in our hearts is after we go. I can’t think of anyone more qualified than Cory to write the book on enabling a life-changing trip to truly change you in your post-trip life.”
 –Richard Stearns, president, World Vision, author of *The Hole in Our Gospel*

Can Lasting Change Come From Crosscultural Missions?

It’s the end of your crosscultural experience. You’ve picked up many memories and memorabilia, and along the way you’ve left pieces of yourself behind. You’ve given and received gifts and purchased more for family and friends.

On that last night before returning home, if you’re like me, you aren’t even sure anymore what’s in your bag or suitcase, and you’re fairly certain you can’t take all of it with you. So you pull everything out and spread it on your bed or on the ground, and you try to sort it all out – what to take home, what to leave behind, what reminds you of important encounters, and what it all means. Maybe you brought a few “necessities” from home that you didn’t need after all. Maybe a few things don’t fit *you* very well anymore. And you are determined to make room for some new items that you want to have a part in your ongoing life.

In the same way, your heart and your mind will go through a similar sorting process as you wrap up your encounter, return home, unpack your bags, and resume your regular life. You will try to sort it all out, except that you know this is not a task you can complete in an hour or two. Or a day. Or a week.

In fact, if you truly want your experience to be life changing, you’ll be sorting it and working it out for the rest of your life. After all, that’s what *life* change means.

The upsurge of crosscultural mission-related travel – estimated at two million Americans each year – is quite a recent phenomenon. Hundreds of books, articles, and Bible studies exist to prepare travelers before and during their trips. But beyond a few tips for returning home tucked into the last chapter of a book you’ve now misplaced along the journey, very few resources exist for helping earnest travelers transform their one-time experiences into lifelong learning and change *after the trip*.

Many people want their trip to be life changing, and yet the trip in itself can’t possibly be so! It’s only as your post-trip life unfolds that this transformation can begin to come to pass. Therefore, your ongoing decisions *after you return home* – to either process or ignore, zone out or lean in – are crucial to whether your wish and hope and prayer for a life-changing experience comes true.

This book humbly attempts to aid you in that critical process of integration. Together we can also begin to change the currently condemning statistics about the *non*-impact of these trips

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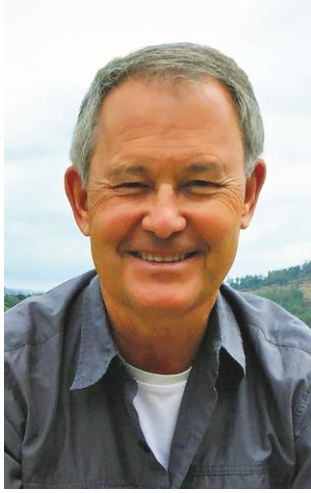


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For more than three decades, **Cory Trenda** has worked with international humanitarian organizations and led crosscultural trips to dozens of countries. A senior director for World Vision, he is the author of *Reflections from Afar: Unexpected Blessings for Those Who “Have” from Those Who Don’t* and lives with his wife, Janet, in southern California. When he’s not traveling internationally to promote poverty alleviation efforts, he works to bridge cultures in the United States.

on the ongoing lives of participants. I hope to share useful tips and proven principles as well as provide glimpses into my own attempts at interweaving my crosscultural encounters into my ongoing life.

Quotes from past trip participants and leaders are featured throughout. As part of the preparation for writing this book, I distributed two surveys: one for past trip participants and another for trip leaders. The respondents, representing numerous churches, denominations, and mission agencies from over a dozen US states, express feelings you’ve probably had and raise some important issues we’ll be addressing in these pages. At the end of the book are “Questions for Reflection and Discussion” designed for group and personal reflection, plus an appendix featuring Tim Dearborn’s Eight Great Questions to further help you process your reentry.

It’s amazing to realize that we can actually glean a lifetime of learning from our one-time crosscultural experiences, and our attentiveness to those lessons is key to a trip truly becoming *life changing*. May this book be a useful tool as you continue your own journey of discovery and integration.

— Adapted from chapter one, “What Now?”