

SWIM TEAM PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION BOOKLET

GENERAL INFORMATION - S.W.I.M.SOLOMON ISLANDS

WHAT IS SWIM?

SWIM (in the Solomon Islands) is an acronym for Short Workshops in Mission. It is the mission arm of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. SWIM was started in the early 1980's with the aim of giving young people in our churches an opportunity to serve overseas on short term mission projects, both in ministry, and also in practical projects such as building and mechanics etc.

INFORMATION ABOUT SWIM TEAMS

SWIM teams these days are made up of people of all ages, both young and old. Sometimes they can be teams from other denominations or students from Christian Schools, and they have worked in various ways all over the Solomon Islands, from Western and Central Province, to Guadalcanal and Malaita.

Whether a SWIM team does Children's ministry, teaching and Bible Study, Building a clinic or school room, medical work, inter school relationships, or whatever else, the aim of SWIM is to have a two way experience, between village people and the SWIM team members. The focus will also be on the Word of God, and what that means in the life of a Christian.



The people in the villages or schools with whom the SWIM team stays, will see through the work and behaviour of SWIM team members, a true picture of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and how that impacts everyday life. However, for the SWIM team members themselves there will be a strong focus on giving each participant a faith changing and faith challenging experience.

There will also be a focus on encouraging the village people to participate in the project, especially on the building teams, in order that they may learn some of the skills of joinery, carpentry, plumbing, electrics, mechanics and whatever.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE

SWIM Solomon Islands can also facilitate mission service opportunities in many areas. Perhaps lecturing for a short time at a Bible College or teaching Bible Workshops in a village. Nursing, physio or other medical placements are also possible. Even helping out with maintenance on the

SWIM base for a short time will always be appreciated. Running a short term “dressing clinic” in a remote village is always a useful exercise. We can usually fill in what ever the Lord lays on your heart to do. God will lead you and us to find your “niche” of service.

AIM OF SWIM

SWIM in the Solomon Islands aims to provide an opportunity for Christian Reformed Church (and other Church) people to experience another culture, serve God in other ways to those experienced in Australian, and share your skills and faith with other Christians from a different part of God’s Kingdom. The learning and sharing is experienced by both SWIM participants and the local people of the Solomons. The blessings are for both sides.

INFORMATION ABOUT SOLOMON ISLANDS

GEOGRAPHY

The Solomon Islands is a group of almost 1,000 islands. There are six main large islands and about 350 others which are populated. Most of the islands are covered with thick dense rain forest, coconut or oil palms, and mountains in the centre. There are many reefs and lagoons, which make snorkelling an added bonus to any SWIM team member.

The population is around 500,000 and about half of these people live on the two islands of Guadalcanal and Malaita. Earthquakes occur fairly regularly, but most of them are small and do not do any damage.

THE PEOPLE

Solomon Islands people are mainly Melanesian (95%), ranging from dark brown skin to almost black, with curly hair. There are some Polynesians (4%) lighter skinned and mostly straight hair, with the remainder of the population being Micronesian. Solomon Islanders are very friendly, hospitable and generous people, and staying in a village in a leaf hut, is the best way to get to know these lovely folk.

When you get outside of the capital Honiara, you will find that the people live a subsistence life style. This means they grow their own food, gather some more food from the forest, go fishing, and build their homes from materials gathered from the bush. Some crafts such as woodcarving and basket weaving helps to bring in small amounts of money for kerosene, soap, tea, sugar and on special occasions, a bag of rice.

Not even half the children in the Solomon Islands go to school, and then half again would not continue school after grade six. School is not free and many families struggle to find the money to educate their children. As few as 33% of the people know how to read.

Health services too are inadequate in many areas, and the “local” clinic can be as much as 5 hours walk away, and even then, be short on the medicine needed. There is a high rate of infant mortality, one of the biggest killers is malaria, and also TB.

Outside of Honiara, the people in the village cannot afford to buy kerosene in large quantities, so bedtime can be very much related to the sun. Being near the equator, sunrise and sunset happen always around the same time throughout the year. 6am to 6 pm is a rough guide. Cooking is

done on open fires in small leaf huts, bathing and washing is done in the river or from a water pipe that comes from a spring nearby. Toilets are generally something similar to an Aussie “bush toilet”. There will be toilet areas for men and toilet areas for women.

CLIMATE

The Solomon Islands has a tropical climate. This means daytime temp. are mostly around 30 – 35 degrees, all year round, and night time temperatures drop to around 22-25 degrees. There are two seasons, wet, from October to March and dry from April to October. There is a lot of rain in some areas, especially Malaita and the Weather coast of Guadalcanal. Some places get as much as 3000 mm of rain annually, Honiara is may be half that. Cyclones are also likely during the wet season, however, most cyclones develop south or east of Solomons and then travel in a southerly or easterly direction. However, the effects of these cyclones can bring bad weather, and rough seas. Most of the time it is hot, sweaty and humid.

EDUCATION AND WORK

Schooling is not compulsory nor is it free. The 2000 census found that less than 50% of children attend school, and one third finish grade six. Fewer still continue into secondary, and only a lucky minority would study at University level. There are many illiterate people, about 33% can read, but not always confidently enough to read a whole book, or understand fully what they are reading.

About 85% of the people do not work for an income. They live mainly through subsistence life style. Gathering and growing food, fishing, crafts, woodcarving and building houses from bush materials. Those who work would live mainly in Honiara and the Provincial capitals, working for the Government as teachers, public servants, health workers etc. Each village will have a small store or two and perhaps someone who owns a canoe or petrol depot, or even bakes bread regularly for an income.

FOOD

Rice, vegetables and fruit are the main daily diet for most people. Fish, shellfish and the odd village chicken help to fill out the menu. The village pig is kept for very special occasions, like wedding feasts or sometimes the farewell party of the SWIM team. There are definitely no McDonalds or KFC type places, not even in Honiara. In the village you will eat mostly local food, but in Honiara, most western type foods can be purchased in the supermarket.

ACCOMMODATION

At the SWIM base the accommodation is reasonably comfortable. Bunk style beds, internal showers and toilets, cooking facilities, laundry, washing machine, bed linen and towels are all provided. You will need to go shopping for your own supplies at the market and in the shops in Honiara, but this is a good cultural experience. Transit house guests cook for themselves and wash their own dishes etc. There are surrounding gardens, swings, volley ball court, leaf “rest house” and outdoor picnic tables. The SWIM base has a no smoking, no alcohol policy for all guests. The base has clean rainwater tanks, safe for drinking.

WATER

Water quality varies from place to place, but generally, care must be taken. In some villages water from a natural spring may be of high standard, and many rivers are clear and fresh, suitable for swimming and washing. Most villages have at least one water tank, and if the roof is in good condition the water should be safe to drink. It is of course always safest to boil all drinking water. Fresh green coconuts are a healthy and 100% safe alternative, loaded with natural electrolytes.

Water in Honiara, is another story. The town water supply is not safe for drinking, but many houses have water tanks that are safe for drinking. The SWIM base has all rain water, and it is kept clean and safe for drinking, without boiling. Tummy troubles due to foul water are most unpleasant and can spoil an otherwise wonderful experience. It is a good idea to always carry your own supply of good safe drinking water.

CHURCH

When SWIM teams visit and stay in the villages, team members will soon realise that church plays a very important role in village life. Morning and evening 7 days a week services are held with varying levels of attendance. Sunday however, church is attended by almost everyone. As a result, many Solomon Islanders have grown up with the village church being very much a part of everyday life, and a true and living personal relationship with Jesus is not always fully understood. Seating, especially in the villages, is segregated, men on one side, women on the other.

When attending church, ladies must wear a longish skirt or dress, and men should wear a button up shirt and longer shorts. For women, sleeveless tops are okay, but spaghetti string tops and bare midriffs are definitely out.

Some churches may ask SWIM teams to participate in the service, either by way of preaching, drama, singing or prayer. So be prepared to get involved. Some services are held in the local language, but it would be appreciated by the village people if you make an effort to attend some of their services, especially the Sunday ones. You will be given many opportunities to share your faith, so be ready and don't be shy.

DO'S AND DON'T IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

When in the Solomon Islands, you are of course, a guest in a very different culture. There are cultural norms that will need to be remembered.

THE BIGGEST ISSUE WILL BE WHAT YOU WEAR.

Solomon Islanders generally have a modest dress code, and especially those in a committed church community. The village people will have expectations of the SWIM team visiting them. They will assume you are all Christians and they will expect you to dress accordingly.

This means that girls cover up well. Longer skirts, and especially in the villages "trousers" (the pijin word for shorts) are frowned upon if worn by girls. Church wear for girls is definitely longer dresses or skirts. You will need to take along something you can wear while bathing. Eg a sarong or something to wrap around you while in the river or standing under the village water pipe. A longish skirt with an elastic waist will do nicely. Bikini's and even swim suits are not acceptable. Women go swimming in loose shorts and a "T" shirt. This may sound strange, but overall, it gives wonderful protection from sunburn, especially if you take doxycycline as your anti-malaria medication, of which one side effect is a tendency to burn quickly from the sun. We strongly recommend that SWIM team members cover up well when swimming for the two reasons given above. Exposed midriffs are an absolute "no-no".

Young men too, have to be sensitive in what they wear. Stubby type shorts would not go over well, the longer type, loose fitting shorts, especially for church would be more acceptable. A button up shirt for worship is also recommended.

Good, strong sandals to protect your feet, and thongs for wearing in the shower and toilet are also needed.

FRANTERNISING WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX

Even married couples in the Solomon Islands do not show affection in public. If you are married, or if your boy friend or girl friend is on the same team, please reserve your intimate times for when you return to Australia. The Solomon Islands culture would look down on two members of the opposite sex finding a quiet little corner for a cuddle, or even sitting in public, hanging on each other etc. SWIM strongly urges all team members to refrain from such activity. Remember that we are guests, and we are also giving a picture of the love Christ. For this reason we need to be sensitive and wise in our actions, and not offend those with whom we are staying.

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO.

IMMUNISATION

Several different types of immunisation are recommended before you come. See your doctor to discuss this. Tetanus and Hep A vaccines are strongly advised. Malaria prophylaxis (prevention medication) are a must. We recommend Doxycycline, it is also an antibiotic and covers things like ear and skin infections. Worms and head lice are a fact of life in the village. Toilet facilities are understandably below western standards, and this also needs to be taken into account.

PASSPORT AND VISA

You will need a current passport with **AT LEAST 6 MONTHS VALIDITY**. An automatic visa will be granted (Maximum 3 months) at the customs area in Honiara if you have a return ticket. If you are not an Australian citizen, you will need an entry permit to re-enter Australia after your visit to the Solomon Islands.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Your travel agent should assist with travel insurance. Things do sometimes get stolen or lost, and SWIM takes no responsibility for this. Building and musical teams especially are advised to insure all tools and musical instruments.

SPENDING MONEY

You will not need a lot of spending money. \$200 AUD (About \$1,200 Sol.) is generally amply spending money. It also does not look good, if we spend thousands of dollars on souvenirs when we go for mission. Food and accommodation, and local travel costs are usually taken care of through team bookings, but for personal spending we suggest you set a limit. In many cases, team members are given gifts of local craft items to take home as well.

There are now several ATM machines in Honiara, so money is easily available through that medium. However, Australian Dollars can be easily changed at the bank, and a team telegraphic transfer (into the SWIM account) can be made from Australia before your departure. Visa and Mastercard are also accepted in many places, but generally not outside Honiara.

WHAT TO PACK

All team members:.

1. Several outfits, wash and wear types for hot weather.
2. Good church clothes
- 3 .Hat and sunscreen
4. Anti malaria medication
5. Panadol, and other personal medicine needs
6. Plenty of band-aids and an antibiotic cream
7. Bible and devotions book
8. Cotton Duna cover to use as a sleeping bag
9. Toothbrush/paste, soap, shampoo, towel etc.
10. Tropical strength insect repellent
11. Decent, but cool sleepwear.
12. Good strong sandals, and a pair of thongs.
13. Flip photo folder with family and church shots.
14. Torch for night walking in village.
15. Hat and sunglasses for the hot sun
16. Plenty of sunscreen
17. Nibblies if you tend to get hungry between meals
18. small gifts, like balloons, to give to the children
19. A water container to carry your personal water supply.

Girls:

1. Sanitary pads, tampons etc.
2. A sarong type outfit to wear for bathing at the village water pipe or river
3. Longish skirt or 2 for wearing to church
4. Board shorts and T shirt for swimming, (No bikinis)
5. No hair dryer (no power)
6. Mirror (there won't be one anywhere)

Boys:

1. Button-up type shirt for wearing to church
2. Tank tops are okay but not for church
3. Longer shorts for swimming and bathing (speedos are frowned on)
4. Mirror and shaving gear.

For the team:

A well stocked first aid kit, and someone on the team who can do dressings and care for minor cuts, bruises and illnesses of team members. A nurse, or someone with a first aid certificate would be ideal. SWIM has the kits on base, but each team will need to "boost" supplies by bringing them in when you arrive.

WHAT NOT TO BRING

Alcohol and cigarettes are banned in some churches here. SWIM suggests that all team members refrain from smoking and drinking while in the Solomon Islands on their SWIM team journey. The SWIM base too, is alcohol and smoke free. Please abide by this rule.

SOME FINAL POINTS OF USEFUL INFORMATION.

1. Taking anti malaria medicine is of vital importance. No matter what your doctor says, you need to start taking your medication 2 days before arriving and for at least 2 weeks after departing. Malaria is a killer disease, so do not take any chances.
2. If you feel ill when returning to Australia, even months after your stay in Solomon Islands, tell your doctor that you have been in a malaria area. A few team members have been ill with malaria as long as 8 months after their visit.
3. Young children, under 8 cannot take Doxycycline, but there are other medications which are suitable for that age group. We have had children (even babies) come here and stay, without catching malaria.
4. Pregnant women too, cannot take doxycycline, so see your doctor about alternative action.
5. There are now several ATM machines in Honiara, but not anywhere else in the Solomon Islands. Visa Card, Master Card and American Express are accepted in many places.
6. When you stay on the base in the transit house, you will be expected to buy your own food supplies and cook for yourself(ves). Transport to the market and shops is available.
7. The SWIM truck will meet all SWIM team members at the airport on arrival and take you there for departure as well.
8. OUR FINAL AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATION IS THAT YOU HAVE A PRAYER BACK UP TEAM BACK IN AUSTRALIA STANING BY TO PRAY THROUGH ALL THE LITTLE HASSLES AND PROBLEMS THAT CAN OCCUR WHEN LIVING AND WORKING IN VILLAGE SITUATIONS. MANY TEAMS HAVE GIVEN TESTIMONY OF THE STRENGTH AND GRACE THEY HAVE RECEIVED IN TIMES OF TRIAL WHEN THEY SHARED WITH THEIR PRAYER PARTNERS BACK IN AUSTRALIA THEIR NEEDS AS THEY CAME UP. WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT PRAYER IS AN INTERGRAL PART OF YOUR PLANNING AND OUT WORKING OF YOUR MISSION OR PROJECT.