

Is there increased interest in longer mission trips?

A recent study of the trips most looked at on ShortTermMissions.com raises the question as to whether there is more interest in longer mission trips than we had thought.

In the past, 12% of the searches on ShortTermMissions.com have been for trips greater than or equal to three months in length and 9% more were for trips one to two months in length. Tracking the lengths of the trip descriptions actually viewed this past year says that the interest in longer trips is much higher currently than expected or that those interested in longer trips look at more options.

During the time period of January 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 (18 months) the trip descriptions on ShortTermMissions.com were viewed 639,280 times. During that same time period 34,700 inquiries were made from the website to the various organizations posting on mission trips on the website.

A question arose as to the percentage of trip views that were for trips with lengths three months and longer. Trips three months and longer usually are considered to be mission or cross cultural internships, if not outright ministry. In the past such trips showed up in our spring search results accounting for about 12% of the searches made. As we considered the possibility of providing more specialized service to those seeking longer trips, we wondered whether the number of longer trips actually looked at would be around that 12% which has showed up in the searches in the past.

To our surprise, the percentage of actual trip descriptions looked at which were three months or longer in length was around 25%! That is double what we had anticipated.

Methodology

Each month we report to the organizations posting trips on ShortTermmissions.com the number of times each of their trips are viewed during the month plus the number of inquiries they received as a result of people viewing their trip descriptions. To compile a table of the trip views for the 18 month period we simply joined all 18 of those files, sorted by trip_id, and summarized them into one line per trip. That monthly data comes from our Google Analytics account so it is filtered for non-human activity.

Then we went to the live site and queried our database for a list of all the trips that had been marked for a length of longer than or equal to three months. That list was downloaded from MySQL and loaded into an Access table showing the trip_id and the length.

Finally, the two tables were queried as to all the trips displayed during that 18 month period that had been marked for a trip length greater than or equal to three months. We

grouped the results by trip_id and summed the columns of the number of trip views and inquiries.

The end result was a table of 2116 trips. Those 2116 trips of length three months or longer had been seen 153,850 times over those 18 months and 9,197 inquiries had been made to the organizations listing those trips.

Results

That means that 24% of the trip views were for trips three months or longer in length (153,850/639,280) and that 27% of the inquiries made during that time period were for those longer trips (9197/34,700).

In addition, 31% of the trip descriptions viewed were for trips going for longer than or equal to one month and 33% of all inquiries were for trips longer than or equal to one month. (200,609/639,280 and 11,496/34,700).

Of the 4872 total trips displayed during that 18 month period, 2116 were for three months or longer. That is 43% of the trips but they accounted for 24% of the trip views and 27% of the inquiries.

They received less traffic per trip than trips less than one month in length. But it is substantially more than the 12% of searches being made for longer trips which we have seen in the past. See M-DAT's past reports on spring searches at www.mdat.org/reports.

Over the last four years we have also observed that some short term sending agencies have refocused their efforts and are now offering longer term mentoring or discipleship oriented trips. The World Race offered by Adventures in Missions is an example of a year-long missions and cross-cultural experience with discipleship. About a year ago we had also noticed a couple long term mission agencies posting lots of three-month to three-year opportunities on ShortTermMissions.com and observed that they were receiving a lot of trip views.

We will continue to watch as to how this interest may be changing as well as for other examples of organizations successfully offering longer opportunities.