

RYS Participant Guidelines

You must review and agree to these guidelines before volunteering for RYS.

THE RYS APPROACH

The Interreligious Nature of RYS

The essence of RYS is interfaith dialogue and cooperation. As a participant you must be willing to engage in peaceful dialogue and constructive service with people who may have radically different views than your own. These different views usually include religious and political viewpoints. We have liberal and conservative participants and diverse religious representation from the mainline faith traditions to the smaller sects.

Religious Sensitivity

Occasionally we may be invited to a worship service of a faith that is not our own. The attitude of respect and reverence is best served by "dignified imitation" of the tradition being observed. As our program is meant to be experiential, a willingness to fully participate in religious services of other faiths will allow everyone to explore pathways of universal understanding.

It is also common for our project to hold interfaith prayer services in which we all join together in the connection to the Divine as an expression of our commitment to religious harmony and understanding.

We are volunteer workers and students of religion rather than mere tourists. Therefore behavior acceptable for tourists may not be acceptable for us. An important aspect of the learning intended by the RYS is the development of sensitivity to and respect for the religions we may observe. (At the end of this handbook is an Appendix which outlines some general attitudes for visiting religious sites of the major religious traditions.)

Individual and Cultural Sensitivities

You should familiarize yourself with local customs and other sensitivities in order to make your experience a much deeper and richer one.

Please understand that one of the major purposes of the Religious Youth Service is to further the ideal of "World Peace through Religious Dialogue and Harmony". We hope that you as a participant will realize that you are being looked upon by the people that you meet as a representative of your country, your religion, and your culture. We hope that your behavior will help to further our common desire for understanding and peace. Serious verbal denigration of any participant's race, religion, nationality, or culture will not be allowed.

For the sake of the integrity of the group as a whole, it is expected that the attitudes and actions of participants will support the policies of RYS which are outlined in this handbook. In the case of any violation of these stated goals and objectives, the participant will be given verbal warning. If there is no correction, he/she may be dismissed.

Male/Female Relationships

One of the most sensitive areas of cultural differences concerns relationships between men and women. For example, in Muslim cultures, the mere physical touch between a man and a woman in public takes place only if they are married. A woman wearing revealing clothing is considered to have very loose morals, and a woman entering a man's bedroom, or vice versa, is considered the same. RYS aims to create a wholesome spirit, encouraging positive interaction between participants.

Clothing

It should be noted again here that clothing is an important aspect of the message that you are sending to others. In different cultures, the same clothing may be sending an entirely different message. Those who are not used to seeing revealing clothing (RYS participants as well as members of the community) may feel uncomfortable and alienated. Again, we recommend modesty as the best policy for men and women.

Alcoholic Beverages

No alcoholic beverages will be served at any time during the program. All participants, while they are representing RYS, are asked to abstain from alcohol throughout the whole project. (The only exception is if a local host serves you an alcoholic drink in his or her home, and it could prove impolite to refuse. Then use your own discretion and sensitivity.) Drinking is not permissible during free time.

Smoking

Smoking is discouraged, and prohibited at meals, meetings, in vehicles and sleeping areas. It is objectionable to others, as well as injurious to their health. If you must smoke, please be sensitive to those around you.

Noise, Loud Music

Living in close quarters requires additional sensitivity. Please allow for the needs and desires of others to rest, reflect and meditate, by keeping a quiet atmosphere in group settings, especially in public areas. Do not play loud music in a sleeping area.

ORGANIZATION AND ACTIVITIES

Commitment

In order for the project to fulfill its commitments to the local communities, and for you to gain the most from the program, you are expected to participate in the regular work schedule (barring health problems), as well as the scheduled cultural events. You should also be prepared to help in the cleaning of the living space. People who do not actively participate in all aspects of the program will be asked to withdraw from the project. We are coming together not only to work but to participate in an interreligious community, and all these activities help build and enrich us as a community.

The project by its nature involves travel—to and from work sites and other locations. Transportation will be provided. However, it is essential that you get to the vehicles before the time scheduled for their departure, since they will leave at that time even if

some volunteers have not arrived. We will be working with local people, so we must maintain a professional standard in our work schedule, even though we are only "volunteers."

Schedule

Upon arrival, the entire group will remain together for Orientation. After the Orientation, our entire group will divide into groups. For multi-site projects, the site groups usually function autonomously with their own structure and accommodations. Participants at each site will work in one community with a specific work project designed for the benefit of that particular community. RYS does not impose project ideas on the selected communities, but responds to their requests. Then during the closing, we will again come together as an entire group for a reflection/retreat before our departures.

Structure

Leadership

Each site will be coordinated by a site couple who, assisted by the headquarters staff and a local on-site staff, are in the position to manage the work at the project site. The site directors will guide the interreligious evening and weekend programs as well as serve as a connecting point for RYS in community relations. When appropriate, the site directors will call together the entire site group to disperse information or to discuss important issues.

Small groups

Each site will be divided into 3 to 4 teams, each with a group leader and about 9-10 participants. There are several purposes for these small groups. On the practical side, they are very helpful for tasks such as cleaning, traveling to and from the job sites, task organization and training, and health maintenance. Breaking into teams will greatly facilitate the smooth flow of the whole project. Individual participants are expected to work within the context of their team in order to avoid confusion. On the social and cultural side, these groups will provide an environment more intimate than the entire project group. The smaller number will make it easier to meet and get to know each other and to develop deeper relationships.

We will try to include as great a mixture of religions, cultures, races and nationalities as possible in making up each small group. This way there will be someone in each group able to represent the different religions and parts of the world as much as possible.

Group Leaders

Group leaders have been selected to represent the various world religions, cultures, and nationalities. They all have different areas of expertise. They will try to help you have a fulfilling experience as best they can. They are also responsible for job coordination. Please get to know your group leader well and freely communicate problems to him or her. Remember, group leaders are also participants who need your support and friendship.

Three or four times per week, there will be opportunities to meet together as a group. These meetings will provide the chance to share experiences and inspirations, discuss lectures and related topics, and deal with any problems or practical concerns.

Friendships

The participants of RYS are drawn from a diversity of backgrounds. As roommates, group participants and site co-workers, we will have a unique opportunity to learn how to relate to individuals whose perspectives are very different from our own.

One of our purposes is to promote friendships among group members and site participants. Although it may often be easier to associate with those of similar cultures, associating with participants from other countries and religions can be a broadening and rewarding experience. We encourage you to take full advantage of this opportunity to share with this world community.

Journals, Creative Writing and Art Work

The project may go very quickly, and it will all tend to blur unless one keeps some kind of record. A journal will help you to remember and to reflect on your experiences of the summer later on. You may want to keep a record of poems, descriptions, or sketches. Not only will you encounter other cultures and religions, and other members of the group as individuals, but you will also be able to see yourself from a different perspective. A journal will help you to reflect on these encounters and grow through them.

Information Board

We will maintain an information board in a central location during the Orientation and Closing periods. Also at each work site, there will be a public information board. Information about the daily itinerary, optional programs, group meetings, work schedules, maps, etc., will be posted on this board. Participants should become accustomed to checking the Information Board for current information.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Health and Medical

The Religious Youth Service will do everything possible to ensure your health and comfort throughout the project. A medical specialist will be available at each project. However, you should be aware that the standard of care in each nation differs. Food and water quality as well as sanitary conditions may not be what you are accustomed to. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest health standards. However, part of the responsibility for health maintenance is yours. Be sure to eat wisely and to get enough rest

We strongly recommend that all participants obtain traveler's insurance. Travel insurance is available at: <http://www.eglobalhealth.com/RYS.html>

Immunizations

All inoculations against disease and personal medications are the responsibility of the individual. Check with local health officials for the recommendations to follow. There are specific immunizations required to enter some countries for those participants coming from areas of the world where yellow fever is a problem. Proof of inoculation may be required to obtain visas.

Diet

We will do our best to provide a diet suitable for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Local food will be available. It is impossible to cater to every person's specific food needs. If you have a taste for a food or spice specific to your culture, we recommend that you bring some of it with you.

Our meals will be cooked by local people, in a moderated local style. We endeavor to have fruit at least once a day. Please be prepared for a few days' systemic adjustment to this diet. Drink plenty of pure water to prevent dehydration.

Personal Security

Possessions left in public may be considered to be of no further value to the owner. Don't tempt people by being careless with your things. We will have security at our living quarters; yet, absolute security cannot be guaranteed, and the final responsibility is yours. If you must leave your things for a while, ask a friend to watch them. Looking out for each other will help create a more secure environment. When leaving public transportation, be sure to take your belongings with you. Handbags and shoulder bags with valuables should be carried in front, not on the side or in back, in order to prevent theft. You may want to consider further safety precautions for securing your pocket valuables.

Videocameras and electronic equipment may need to be registered upon entry. Keep a record of the serial numbers on all your valuable equipment. Also be reminded that your passport is a valuable possession. It is advisable to keep a copy of all your important documents in a safe place.

Weather

In some regions the weather may be very hot. If you are not accustomed to this climate, please be cautious of strong direct sunlight. We strongly recommend that those from cooler climates use tanning lotion or sunscreen until your skin has developed a tan. It is very important to bring a hat that will protect your head, neck and face from the sun. In cooler climates, please bring warm clothes.

FINANCES

RYS's Responsibilities

The RYS will provide for in-country accommodations, three meals per day, health care and transportation during the program schedule. You are responsible for all of your lodging and meals before and after the program.

Meals are provided on a group basis, usually at the living site. If you eat at a different time or place than the rest of the group, your meal will not be paid for.

Please note that the Religious Youth Service cannot take responsibility for your personal money and valuables. There will be security at the living sites, but we cannot guarantee safety. We suggest that you do not bring especially valuable items, such as: expensive tape recorders, cameras, radios, watches, etc.

The RYS accountant will not be able to exchange currency or act as a bank. The RYS will not be responsible if your money is lost or stolen. If your money is lost or stolen, you will have to forego purchase of personal items. The RYS will not lend you money under any circumstances.

There are certain expenses which the RYS will not cover. These include telephone calls (which can be very expensive), postage, snacks or soft drinks, taxi or bus fares during your free time, gifts, souvenirs, etc. You will want to bring along a certain amount of personal money for this. We recommend that you do not bring large amounts of cash, but use traveler's checks. Be sure to have enough of relatively small denominations. This will make things easier if you don't want to carry a large amount of the local currency.

Currency Exchange

In general it is advisable to exchange only as much money into the local currency as you are sure that you will spend. There are banks and exchanges for this purpose. It may be the case, however, that you cannot exchange your currency. You must research this prior to arrival. If your nation's currency is not widely used throughout the world, it may be best to exchange it for U.S. dollars or the local currency before arriving. For further details please consult tourist guides such as "Fodor's Modern Guides" which give information about currency and customs regulations.

TRANSPORTATION

Arranging your flight

RYS participants will be responsible to set up their own transportation to and from their service country. The official travel agent of RYS is GOWORLD travel (travel@goworldinc.com). However, you may use any travel agency or travel website to obtain your tickets. We strongly recommend that all participants obtain traveler's insurance. Travel insurance is available at: <http://www.eglobalhealth.com/RYS.html>

References in the host country, address and telephone numbers of where you are staying as well as arrival and departure dates and times should be obtained from your project director before you leave home.

RYS will be responsible for participants until the scheduled end of the project. Any further extension of your stay, resultant transportation and/or any other expenses incurred will be the participant's responsibility.

Please send your travel itinerary to us at: info@religiousyouthservice.org 2 weeks before your scheduled project so that we can arrange your pickup at the airport.

Arrival

Upon arrival you will go through an immigration station to determine whether your visa and/or other papers are in order. It is common for individuals to be asked about the purpose of their visit, the length of their stay, their accommodations, and finances. For "purpose of entry" put "tourist."

As you come out of customs, our staff will be awaiting you and they will display RYS signs. Please introduce yourself (First Name, Last Name and Country) and they will see that you have your transportation arranged to our orientation area.*

If you do not see a person holding a RYS sign, please call the phone number you were given. Introduce yourself and explain that you are waiting for pickup at the airport. Local representatives will give you directions on how to proceed. (Do not leave the airport without contacting your local representative.)

*Unless directed otherwise

IN SUMMARY

Thank you for the worldwide vision and selfless desire that you have demonstrated by offering to volunteer in serving others.

It is our hope that the guidelines in this handbook will be helpful to prepare for a special, and even life-changing experience. The spirit of each individual adds a unique dimension and a quality of beauty to the group as a whole. In this way, we are all responsible to create the Religious Youth Service. As we reach out with a sacrificial heart and fully give of ourselves at the work sites in needy communities and to friends from unfamiliar cultures, our horizons expand and our hearts begin to grow. To gain the most from the experience, it is important to arrive with a fresh outlook and a spirit of adventure. Surely there will be minor difficulties but, because of our united goal to serve and our desire to cooperate as a world community, we can overcome them. Through our victories on a personal level, we can gain hope for peace on a worldwide level, it is this hope that we can each carry back to our own nations and share with others in our daily lives.

We look forward to meeting you!

NORMS

Prior to your acceptance to an RYS Project you will be required to sign a commitment to follow these norms. The Norms will also be reviewed during the project orientation.

Alcohol and Illegal Drugs

Consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs is not permitted during the project. If you partake in these substances in your current lifestyle, we ask that you respect this policy of abstinence during the full extent of the program.

Exclusive Relationships

One of the central purposes of RYS is for each participant to experience the wondrous diversity of our human family. Maintaining an exclusive relationship with one person during an RYS project is antithetical to the spirit of the program and is thus unacceptable.

RYS aims to create a wholesome spirit. Exclusive personal relationships are not conducive to creating a healthy public atmosphere. Participants are therefore required to refrain from sexual relations during the program in order to devote all energies to living for the sake of the community we are serving. Promiscuous behavior will result in dismissal. If you disagree with this sexual/moral standard or believe that you cannot abide by this policy for the term of a project, it is better that you not attend.

Smoking

Smoking is discouraged, and prohibited at meals, meetings, in vehicles and sleeping areas. It is objectionable to others, as well as injurious to their health. If you must smoke, please be sensitive to those around you.

Noice and Loud Music

Living in close quarters requires additional sensitivity. Please allow for the needs and desires of others to rest, reflect and meditate, by keeping a quiet atmosphere in group settings, especially in public areas. Do not play loud music in a sleeping area.

Illegal Drugs and other illegal activities

Those who violate local laws or run afoul of local authorities for carrying illegal substances or committing crimes may be subject to penalties or even imprisonment. Anyone in this situation will have to take full responsibility for his/her action. Anyone found carrying or using illegal drugs jeopardizes the stature of the whole Religious Youth Service group and will be subject to dismissal.