IMMERSION

Immersion trips provide students a wonderful opportunity to experience life in another culture. By living in solidarity with another community students come to realise the true beauty of the people and environment that another place offers.

They carry with them gifts for the communities that they visit but they often receive abundant gifts in return; gifts of kindness, acceptance, love and laughter. It is hoped that each person who journeys on these trips will come back to Notre Dame College enriched with the gifts and blessings offered by the people that they encounter along the way and that they then share these gifts with our community.

• It’s important that students understand the true meaning of Immersion trips and eliminate the idea that is simply a holiday.
• Ingrain the ‘no regrets’ mantra.
• Remind students of the commitment Immersion trips require - this was outlined from the very beginning and students need to continually show this commitment throughout the Immersion journey, including commitments on return.
• Everybody needs to pull their weight and contribute.
• Immersion trips are essentially about the communities visited, not the visiting individual.
• Ensure students are above and foremost respectful within the communities, the communities are not tourists attractions! Students are to uphold the dignity of the human person at all times.
• Immersion trips need to practice the Catholic Ethos as modeled by Notre Dame College. There is direct link interlacing faith with the works of Immersion, not just in the works of Jesus, but in personal faith development.
What does it mean to be rich?

- We often have so much stuff, we don’t realise what we really have. In terms of richness communities visited are often richer in spirituality, humility, kindheartedness and family and community spirit. This is the greatest richness a person could have.

Be Brave!

- Students are encouraged to ‘take their shoes off’ get uncomfortable and be a part of the community.
- They need to be prepared to get uncomfortable emotionally, physically, socially, and on the return to home.
- It is essential for students to have an open mind and be willing to learn and give 100% to the experience.

Honour Dignity

- Using a person’s name is the first step to honouring someone’s dignity.
- It is important students take time to learn names and politely ask if forgotten or misheard.
- Students are to be present and provide their full attention.
- Students are to be authentic, it is poor practice to speak to members of the community and then behind their backs scrutinise/judge/belittle.
- Immersions are not ‘Poverty Tourism’.
- Students must be prepared to ask permission/consent to take photos of adults and children, remember the communities aren’t a tourist attraction. Respect is paramount.
- The people of the communities visited are more than capable to complete tasks, community members should not be belittled by students taking over their tasks, or trying to show them how western culture thinks it should be done.
- Students are expected to live out our College Motto – To Seek, To See, To Respond – be sure to respond in the most respectful, useful way possible.
Students are asked to walk in their shoes – but be humble. Encourage students to:

- Have acceptance for the visiting communities way of life, their food and their customs.
- Be respectful - it is impolite to say no.
- Show respect in terms clothing, behaviour, attitude and image.
- Make knowledge mature choices.
- Remember an Immersion trip is not a showcase, groups are there to walk with them, not to spectate/gawk.
- If invited, students may assist the community, but are not to take over.
- Students are encouraged and be willing to try and open to new experiences.
- Listen, Learn, Discern, Affirm.

Student self-preparation:

- Encourage students to live the values they want to see in the world be selfless, show dignity, be inclusive, model your behaviour and be respectful.
- Develop knowledge and research, ask questions and be open to learning.
- Positive attitude – openness and humility.
- Learning for action – how do students respond to this?
- Self-reflection is very important, students are asked to question their assumptions.
- If students come home and all they have is taken is just to simply be grateful for what they have – they have missed the point. Ask, what have these communities offered them?
- Almost everybody students will meet would have been through some sort of trauma in their life. Students need to be prepared.
- Nothing is achieved without challenges.
- A good ice breaker is for students to take a photo (a physical hard copy photo) of their family and pets (nothing flashy – be very mindful of the image you are portraying of the students western life) to use as a item to sit down with a member of the community and explain the students family and share stories.
It is important that the students are given every opportunity to reflect and connect spiritually with the experience, so regular structured reflections must form part of daily activities while away. Group leaders are aware they must facilitate this.

As part of the group formation in the lead up to the Immersion experience, each Immersion group is asked to make a journal, this document is a useful tool that should assist students personal reflection, document the experience of every day and bring to life the personal learning and growth that students experience on an Immersion trip. Students will be given allocated time and space for journaling.

Prayer will be conducted regularly and students will be given the opportunity to run prayer sessions within their group. Prayer is an important part of the Immersion experience and a vital way to connect spiritually and meaningfully with the community and each other.

Leaders will continually communicate with students and will check in regularly with each student to monitor how each member is going physically, emotionally and spiritually.
In order for each Immersion trip to be a meaningful experience for all, it is essential that all participants demonstrate a level of cultural sensitivity. Each student will travel in spirit of humility, with a genuine desire to meet and talk with local people. It is therefore important students familiarise themselves and respect local customs. To welcome all that the hosts offer with graciousness and a sincere appreciation. And also reflect daily on each experience to better understand the world from a perspective different than their own.

- It can be very easy to offend communities without realising it in terms of clothing, behaviour, body language and opinions.
- Students need to be very mindful of flashing ‘western life’ western opinions, and ‘wealth’ in and around communities.
- What our students normal is and the normality of the communities visited are very different.
- Students need to be aware that they are the visitors in their home and they are there to immerse themselves into their culture.
• It is vital the group knows one another well prior to leaving for the trips to ensure the utmost care and overall wellbeing of every student. Meetings provide essential bonding time for leaders and students to build relationships on a personal level.

• Ensure students are organised and are able to attend weekly meetings in addition to social events that may run in the lead up and after the trip to further develop relationships.

• Formation continues after the trip to ensure students (and staff) handle the reverse culture shock felt on return.

• Communication and correspondence with the group is paramount. Students are to communicate with leaders throughout the entire journey, in the lead up to, during the Immersion trip and on return.

• In the weeks leading up to the groups depart, all students and their families are invited to attend the Farewell Commissioning Dinner. This is an important event in the Immersion Programme to celebrate the beginning of this journey.

**Benefits of a Immersion:**

• Cultivating an openness to new thinking and ideas
• inspiring a desire for positive change, locally and globally
• Developing self-awareness
• Developing respect for others
• Developing skills of inquiry and critical thinking, and the ability to apply these to local and global issues
• Developing the ability to communicate in different ways and settings
• Developing an appreciation of diversity
• Deepening a sense of injustice and a commitment to tackling it
• Fostering an understanding of how local and global are interconnected, and of the impacts that actions have at both levels.
• It is a vital part of the Fijian immersion experience that students partake in a project whilst visiting communities. Projects in the past have included; building a kitchen, the construction of a pond to farm fish, creating a computer lab, installing fencing, planting trees and painting school facilities.
• Fundraising money is to be used completely for projects where the Fijian locals sees fit, within the community. This is decided on arrival to the village.
• Broome communities don’t require the same school facility aid as other groups but fundraising is to be spend to assist the local indigenous people within the community ie. Cultural Tours = supporting the local communities etc.
• Timor Leste fundraising money is direct debited by Notre Dame to the Marist Brothers prior to the group leaving for Immersion. This money is used to assist the improvement of facilities at Abufala Primary School. Thanks to a long relationship with Abufala and under direction from the Marist Brothers, fundraising has built brand new classrooms at the school.
It’s vital the group stays focused on the fundraising in the lead-up to Immersion trips.

Fundraising money doesn’t contribute to individual travelers but to be spent within communities ie. school supplies, uniforms, educational requirements, facility improvements etc.

All members of the group need to actively contribute to fundraising efforts and the group as a whole needs to determine fundraising methods. Parents are also welcome to offer support with this too.

There is no specific target to hit, but $1000 is generally an achievable minimum.

Fundraising money will be transferred into correct currency by Finance.

Students often forget about overhead costs when fundraising and are disheartened when realise that after costs are covered, their isn’t as much profit as initially thought.

**Fundraising ideas:**

- Bake Sale (Bake sales after Sunday Masses at local parishes have proven to be successful in the past)
- Chocolate/Lolly Sales (be mindful of costs vs profit)
- Icy Pole Sale
- Raffles (Target events - ie Mothers Day, Easter etc)
- Athletics/Games Day with Year 9 students/junior students
- Presentations at Community Clubs (Rotary, Lions etc)
- Utilising the Canteen for sales of pizzas, hot dogs etc. (be conscious of what the canteen already sells)
- Community BBQs
- Utilise Athletics and Swimming Carnivals to generate fundraising
- Art/Craft Stall
- Auctions
- Trivia Night
- Bingo Night
- Karaoke Night
- Quiz Night
- Plant Sale
- High Tea Event
- Guess How Many Lollies in the Jar Competition
- Battle of the Bands/Concert
- Staff Challenge (what are staff willing to do the students would pay to see)
- Eating Competition
• Leaders of this experience have been selected because the College believes they are capable of making the safest and best decisions at the time and will always ensure the safety of the students. The nature of these trips mean that nearly every decision leaders make will be moderated by the circumstances that they will be made in. Leaders will need to regulate and balance the desire for significant life experiences and challenges that they are a feature of Immersion trips with the safety of the students in their care.

• Notre Dame College Child Safety Policy is to be adhered to in addition to other College policies surrounding excursions and camps.
**IMMERSION LOCATIONS**

**BROOME**
- **DEPART:** MELBOURNE
- **STOPOVER:** PERTH
- **DESTINATION:** BROOME
  (STAY ONE NIGHT IN BROOME)
- **FINAL DESTINATION:**
  DRIVE FROM BROOME TO LOMBADINA/DJARINDJIN COMMUNITIES

**FIJI**
- **DEPART:** MELBOURNE
- **STOPOVER:** NADI, FIJI
- **DESTINATION:** SAVU SAVU
  - FINAL DESTINATION:
  DRIVE FROM SAVU SAVU TO NOMINATED VILLAGE
    - KANA KANA
    - KOROKO
    - NAPUKA

**TIMOR LESTE**
- **DEPART:** MELBOURNE
- **STOPOVER:** DARWIN
- **DESTINATION 1:** DILI
  (STAY IN DILI INITIALLY)
- **DESTINATION 2:**
  DRIVE FROM DILI TO BAUCAU
BROOME

Dampier Peninsula
Ardi, experience the journey beyond Broome

Sealed Road
Unsealed Road (4WD required)
Major Towns
TRANSPORT

• Many students may not have traveled by air before, be mindful of anxiety surrounding this. Be assured that students always travel with at least one leader at all times.
• Flights have been booked by Notre Dame College and all passengers have Travel Insurance.
• Transport options in communities will be different than students are used to – students are to be sensible and respectful of this.
• In the past, a bus has been hired at the families expense to transport students to and from the airport. This is something that needs to be decided on within the group. Some groups decide to only travel to the airport and therefore parents are able to collect students on their return.
• Bus booking is to be organised via Notre Dame College by Immersion Leaders.

LUGGAGE

• Due to the nature of travel on Immersion trips (4WDs, trucks, buses) luggage needs to be in the form of soft, duffle bag style luggage. NOT suitcases.
• Luggage will get dirty, dusty and worn.
• Flight luggage restrictions must be adhered to.
• Students will also be traveling with donated laptops and potentially other donated items to visited communities. This is to be included in each individual students luggage restrictions.

PASSPORTS

• Every student who is traveling to Fiji or Timor requires a passport with a minimum of 6 months until expiry.
• A photocopy of the passport needs to be supplied to Notre Dame College in the months in the lead up to traveling.
• Passports are very important (Fiji and Timor) and must be sited by Immersion Leaders prior to leaving Shepparton (if possible).
• It is an expectation that Immersion Leaders will collect all passports for safe keeping for the duration of the trip and hand back to students prior to traveling home.

SPENDING MONEY

• Students are able to take an appropriate amount of spending money as decided on by parents.
• Between $50 - $100 (AUD) is appropriate.
• Students personal spending money can be converted into appropriate currency via Notre Dame College in the allocated time frame in the lead up the departure. For students willing to take advantage of this option, money is to be placed in individual sealed envelopes with student's name, and Immersion group labeled on front and handed into Faith and Ministry Office, the money is converted and handed back to students at the commencement of their trip by Group Leaders.
• Alternatively parents can arrange currency personally through other means.
• Spending money is for modest souviners and/ or basic snacks during travel. Remind students that it is not a holiday spending spree.
• Fijian Currency = Fijian Dollar.
• Timorese Currency = American Dollar.
**Health**

- Each Immersion leader is First Aid Qualified and First Aid Kits are provided but students are requested to pack their own individual first aid needs due to restrictions of what we can/cannot administer. Every student should have their own supplies of personal medications, creams and ointments.
- Students are to report to leaders during the trip anytime they are feeling unwell, have injured themselves or feeling homesick.
- Due to the nature of these trips, students are required to inquire about immunisations with their own GP. Notre Dame College are not able to offer medical advice, but individual needs should discuss medical needs with a GP in the lead up to the trips.
- All females attending Immersion trips need to be prepared for their menstrual cycle. Due to environmental and travel factors, it is important female students are well prepared. Please ensure students pack adequate sanitary items as well as bags to dispose items, i.e. small scented plastic bags (i.e. nappy bags) and brown paper lunch bags for sealing and disposal in general waste. The locations visited treat this waste differently than students will be used to. Students are able to speak with staff regarding this if need be.

**Food and Water**

- Students are encouraged to fully immerse in the culture and that includes eating the local food.
- Food choices are consciously selected with health and safety in mind (i.e. no street food etc).
- Students are NOT to bring comfort snack foods from home.
- Students also need to be wary of feeling a little unwell when eating a different diet than they are used too. It’s common to feel a little unwell when eating foreign foods, the same may happen on arrival back to their home life.
- In Fiji and Timor, bottled drinking water is to be purchased in bulk on arrival to destinations. Leaders will organise this.
- Those in Fiji are to re-use plastic water bottles for the duration of the trip with water treated with supplied Aquatabs. Students should bring their own reusable water bottle from home for this practice.
- Aquatabs are water purifiers that are dropped into any water that is consumed. Each group will be supplied adequate Aquatabs for the duration of the trip (supplied by Notre Dame College).
- Aquatabs will be used for all water used including cooking and preparing food. Fijian communities are aware of this practice and happily follow this process in cooking practices.
- The Timor Leste Immersion group is to use bottled water at all times (no re-filling at all) leaders are aware of this.
- The Broome Immersion group don't need to worry about amended drinking water practices.
CLOTHING

- Conservative clothing is a must and all students need to be mindful of clothing choices and remain culturally respectful.
- Modest necklines and hem lines are a must!
- No singlets (male and female).
- Shorts length needs to be appropriate and nothing too tight or revealing.
- No tight active wear ie, no athletic tights.
- All students (male and female) need to bring a long sarong (to wear over legs for special events) and for times when privacy is required. This is a must for all students traveling to Fiji, optional for other trips but recommended for Timor (male and female).
- Modest clothing (shorts and t-shirt) is to be worn over any swimming attire when swimming throughout Immersion trips remaining respectful to the visiting communities.
- Leaders will ask students to change if they feel clothing to be inappropriate.
- It is an expectation of each group to design a group t-shirt (at an additional cost) that can be worn as a symbol of identity while away and a keepsake on return. This is part of the group formation process.

MOBILE PHONES

- Students are NOT permitted to take personal mobile phones on Immersion. (Phones are not to be taken on flights or during travel – they are to be left at home).
- Phones cannot be used to take photos. Photos can be taken on a digital/disposable camera.
- A school mobile phone is allocated to all group leaders and phone numbers are published for parents therefore this is the phone to be used should parents need to contact students in emergency cases.

WEBSITE BLOG

- Leaders will send updates while students are away which will be uploaded onto the website blog to keep parents updated.
- These updates will be kept brief to preserve the students joy in sharing personal stories when they return home.

SIMPLE GIFTS

- Students are encouraged to take stickers, fake tattoos, balloons, bubbles, small Australian plush toys etc. to hand out to children within the community during the visit to Fiji, Timor or Broome.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

- For those Immersion Trips that leave on the evening of a school day students are expected to be at school. This is part of their commitment to the trip and there is no reason why they shouldn’t be at school during the day if flights are late.
PERSONAL ITEMS

• Tent (Fiji only)
• Sleeping Mat
• Pillow
• Sheet or thin blanket (or sleeping bag)
• Head torch
• Spare batteries
• Water Bottle
• Eating utensils – plate, bowl, spoon, fork, cup
• Insect repellant
• Sunscreen
• Hand sanitiser
• Baby wipes
• Scented nappy bags (for dirty clothing and sanitary requirements)
• 5 x underwear
• Sanitary napkins
• Toiletries, basic first aid needs and personal medication
• Micro-fibre towel (quick dry)
• One set of good clothes (for trip home)
• Long Sarong – cover legs - Male and Female (For Fiji - Broome and Timor optional)
• Canvas/sandshoes/aqua shoes (to wear in water)
• Closed toe shoes (ie. runners)
• Thongs
• Light raincoat/poncho
• Immersion polo shirt
• 1 jumper
• 4 pairs of shorts (reasonable length)
• 4 t-shirts (modest)
• Board shorts
• Bathers
• T-shirt (for swimming)
• Pyjamas
• Hat
• Sunglasses
• Disposable camera or battery operated camera (no mobile phones)
• Watch (cheap one – leave behind if you like)
• Journal and pen
• Passport (Fiji and Timor)

GIFTS – OPTIONAL EXTRAS

• Snorkel & flippers (Fiji and Broome)
• Fake Novelty Tattoos (Australian inspired)
• Stickers (Australian inspired)
• Balloons
• Bubbles
• Toys (yo-yos, glow sticks, frisbees etc)
• Sporting equipment
**General**

The locals wear their best clothes to Sunday Mass. For them, it is a sign of respect for God and their religion. Almost all women wear dresses to Mass.

- Clothes should be modest, neat and clean.

**Males**

- long trousers
- shoes
- shirts with sleeves

**Females**

- dresses or skirts to the knee or below (or slacks)
- shoulders to be covered (i.e. no spaghetti straps)
- shoes or sandals

**Receiving Communion**

**General**

92% of the population in Timor Leste are Catholic. Those who are not Catholic would normally not attend a Catholic Mass. Thus, at communion time, only Catholics go up to the Eucharistic minister. The Eucharistic ministers do not know about giving a blessing to non-Catholics.

Most people in TL receive communion on the tongue, not in the hand. Because of this, a communion plate is used (if the host falls, the plate is there to catch it). It is ok to receive communion in the hand.

The local custom is that those at the back of the church go to communion first.

- only go to the Eucharistic minister if you are receiving communion
- if you are receiving communion on the hand, you need to place your hands above the communion plate
- if you are near the back of the church, be prepared to move forward at the start of communion

Note: While these guidelines are written for Baucau, they probably apply to most of TL.
After the trip students may need time to ‘come down’. It is normal for students to take a few days to get back into routine and mentally prepare for life at home. It is common for students to get sick on the return, feel lonely, or even not know what to do with themselves. Please refer to following page on Reverse Culture Shock. This is something leaders speak to students about as they end their trip.

It is good practice for groups to meet up when they return to ‘normal life’ to assist one another during this ‘come down’ period. Students also need to prepare for the promotion presentations that will follow their trip to staff and students back at school.

Staff and students will need to be prepared present their experience through presentations on their return to;

- Staff in Morning Briefings
- Year 9 Students at Emmaus
- Year 9 Students Parents
- Presentations will involve students to be at school earlier for the staff morning briefing presentation and outside hours for the parent presentation.

Students will need to write a short, personal reflection (150 words) of their Immersion experience on behalf of the entire group to go into College Magazine. (One reflection per Immersion group)

It is recommend this is written fresh when they return, rather than end of year, submitted to Faith and Ministry Office.
It can be difficult, exciting and sometimes frustrating to adjust to a new culture, family, food and lifestyle, and we try to prepare volunteers for the experience of culture shock upon their arrival in their destination. It is important to realise, however that returning home after a volunteering experience can be a similarly jarring and overwhelming experience. Reverse culture shock is the process of adjusting back to your home life after having travelled for a period of time.

Many volunteers find the have mixed feelings about returning home after participating in a placement abroad, as they are torn between excitement at seeing friends and family and sadness at leaving a place and project to which they have attached. Just like when one is leaving to go on a trip, there are often certain expectations about coming home which are not always accurate, and the gap between these expectations and the reality of one’s return can cause some frustration.

The most important aspect of dealing with reverse culture shock is making yourself aware that feeling a bit alienated, out of place, or emotional upon your return is normal and very common after spending time overseas. Many people came home feeling like they have grown and changed in new and exciting ways, only to find out that life at home has remained somewhat constant. It can be difficult and a bit strange to get used to your old lifestyle, but you will find that there are many ways to make this adjustment a bit easier.

Although it can feel like your friends or family don’t understand your experience abroad or the impact it had on you, they will really appreciate you trying to share your stories and photos with them. Your parents will especially appreciate making an effort to share your adventures with them, as they will be eager to understand what you were doing, hear about the people you met and see pictures of the places you visited during your time away.

There are ways to try to incorporate your experience into your life back home, including:
- keeping active in international issues
- Speaking about your experience in an effort to encourage others to volunteer abroad
- Continuing to volunteer locally

It can also be reassuring to keep in touch with friends that you met while you were abroad, as they often going through a similar process of readjusting to like at home. Keeping in touch with others that you met overseas is great for keeping contacts all over the world, and it is always helpful to speak with others who are experiencing similar situations.
Any further queries, questions and concerns please contact Notre Dame College 5822 8400.