

# **Children's HopeChest Travel Guidelines**

Our Mission Statement: Children's HopeChest responds to God's desire to create a world where every orphan knows Him, experiences the blessing of family, and acquires the skills necessary for independent life.

*The policies of Children's HopeChest have been very carefully critiqued to ensure the safety of the trip participants and the integrity of our ministry. The policies are to protect the invested interest of the ministry audience within respective countries, and our national staff. We expect that all trip participants, including leaders, fully respect and submit to the designated authority of Children's HopeChest leadership and staff, including the times, before, during and after your trip. (This does not include hired translators.) We require that you adhere to the authority of Children's HopeChest without exception due to the potential liability that Children's HopeChest incurs within respective countries. While it is our desire that each group has a positive experience, the breadth and scope of the ministry is such that each decision impacts many other aspects of the ministry. Some of the requirements are predetermined by governmental structures, laws and policies.*

## **Your Team's Role**

Short-term mission teams meet a variety of needs, some are construction teams, some evangelistic teams, some vision teams and some training teams. All have a distinct purpose to fulfill while on the field. It is your team's responsibility to try and perform the tasks for your trip to the best of your ability.

Please remember that you are on a *mission* trip. Your role is to represent Christ, your church/business and Children's HopeChest while serving the orphans, orphanage directors, teachers and staff. Keep in mind also that the most well planned itinerary will change on occasion. As they say in the mission world, "*Flexibility is your friend; expectation is your enemy.*" A clear, unequivocal servant's heart is the best tool to bring with you on these trips.

*"Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."*

Mark 10 :45

As you travel with Children's HopeChest, you'll become aware of many cultural differences. We will give you some knowledge of the cultural differences between the U.S. and the country in which you'll be ministering. Don't be the proverbial "ugly American," instead be flexible!

## **Communication with Children's HopeChest**

Communication is the most important aspect involved in organizing a trip. We have set several guidelines for groups.

1. You should expect clear, timely communication from Children's HopeChest.
2. Teams should only communicate with Children's HopeChest through your team leader (or assistant).
3. All camp and travel plans are arranged through our Colorado office.

## **Communication on the Field**

While you're on the field, the first person a team member should address with ideas, problems, concerns or questions is the team leader. Then, the team leader should address the HopeChest national staff member present. The staff member may confer with orphanage directors/teachers before making a final decision. Note: Although our translators are normally warm, concerned, helpful individuals, they are contract employees and not Children's HopeChest national staff and as such, do not make decisions for HopeChest.

## Airline Tickets

1. Children's HopeChest encourages you to make early reservations for your flights. Group fares can aid in lowering costs. For example, try to make your reservations by the end of January for summer trips, doing so allows you more choices and also helps to ensure lower fares.
2. All members of your team **must** arrive and depart on the same day, as well as on the same flight. HopeChest tries to ensure lower costs for your trip, and multiple trips to the airport by our national staff and onward to your location drives up costs to the team.

## The Land Package

The land package price of a trip includes the following:

Children's HopeChest Administrative Fee  
Visa processing (**Russia Only**)  
Travel Insurance (covers medical emergencies)  
In-country ground transportation – defined by itinerary  
Lodging  
Meals (Wines and spirits not included)  
Snacks and bottled water  
Translator fees and expenses  
Tours and Day-off excursion if applicable  
Staff services and incidentals

Payment Deadlines are as follows:

*\$250 non-refundable deposit	Due 12 weeks out
\$250 Payment	Due 8 weeks out
Balance Due	Due 4 weeks out

\* With application and paperwork.

\*\*There will be a \$100/team member late fee if balance is not paid at four weeks out.

## Deadlines

Planning trips for groups does require paperwork for visas and land packages. To complete all items in a timely manner, we have set several deadlines. Submission after these deadlines can result in additional cost to an individual or team.

Team leaders should collect all necessary paperwork from each team member and submit it to the Colorado office according to the due dates. We ask the team leader to make sure all forms are signed and properly filled out. **We ask team leaders to notify the Colorado office in advance if any individual team member cannot submit paperwork on time.**

Financial deadlines are, of course, especially crucial. We require all trip expenses to be paid in full no later than four weeks prior to departure dates. When final payment has been received, we will send all visas, itineraries, emergency contact information, etc., to the team leader who will then distribute to his/her team. Please adhere to our deadline. Extensions on deadlines will be approved on a case by case basis determined between the leader only and our Colorado office. With over five hundred travelers each year, trip planning is a very detailed and time consuming process. We are not able to make last minute additions or adjustments for teams or individuals.

## Photographs of the children (Russia only)

We have been informed that the Ministry of Education in Vladimir has recently instructed every orphanage director to prohibit Americans from taking photographs of the children. Right now this seems to only apply to orphanages in the Vladimir region, but it is possible that those of you going to Kostroma and Ivanovo may experience a similar restriction.

The source for these restrictions is the ongoing debate over foreign adoption within Russia. The media has widely reported the Russian government's furor over recent reports of 13 Russian children who have been killed or abused by their adoptive U.S. parents. This enflames the "anti-adoption" lobby who continue to press for fewer adoptions, and even a moratorium on U.S. adoptions. Such a moratorium would be disastrous, as U.S. families adopt more Russian children than any other country.

For more information, [www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com) or [www.mosnews.com](http://www.mosnews.com) are two sources of reliable information. Their news coverage is excellent. As you work with your teams, please keep the following things in mind:

- 1) The orphanage staff may "look the other way" while you do take pictures.
- 2) You may be asked—perhaps even forcefully—to put away your cameras.
- 3) We request that no one on your team discuss adoption of individual children with the orphanage director, staff or children during this sensitive time.
- 4) You may need pictures for your church's sponsorship of the orphanage. Please ask the director if you can take selected pictures for that purpose.
- 5) This may test one of my favorite sayings – "We are guests in their country, and we will be gracious guests as a testimony to our faith in Christ and our love for these kids."

Above all, please do not be offended by the orphanage directors and caretakers who are carrying out the instructions of their superiors. Please also recognize that this is very uncomfortable for the directors who are used to showing hospitality and love to our travelers and now need to enforce this regulation.

### **Legal Registration of Foreigners (Russia only)**

We must bring to your attention the issue regarding movement of foreign nationals within Russia's borders. In the last few years, Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, has taken many steps to increase security within Russia. Given the ongoing conflict in Chechnya, the Beslan school tragedy, numerous subway bombings in Moscow, and the hijacking and crashing of two airplanes, this is understandable. While these are serious security concerns, they have also impacted some of Children's HopeChests operations.

Practically speaking, the government is becoming more authoritarian with each passing month. Numerous articles in the U.S. and Russian media have noted this change with concern. One major area of emphasis has been enforcing the proper registration of all foreigners visiting Russia. As you know, all travelers must be registered where they are staying, and carry a special migration card. After instances with a few of our teams involving Russia's Federal Security Bureau (FSB), we have taken steps to ensure we are in total compliance with the applicable laws. It is a very time consuming necessity for our staff members while teams are in country.

First and foremost, we are unable to place teams for overnight stays at orphanages. Every traveler with Children's HopeChest must stay at either a hotel that is licensed to register foreign guests, or in private apartments where our staff can register you with the proper offices. Registration is a hassle. Sometimes our staff works for days to obtain the proper stamps and permits for your team. Oftentimes you never see this work because they are miles away at a government office.

It is our hope that these restrictions will loosen over time. We are closely monitoring the situation, and will continue to update you with articles and information. If you have questions, please address them with our office as soon as possible. As the team leader, please pass this along with all our Travel Guidelines to each traveler.

Please know that we are committed to the overall safety of your missions trip. We want to avoid run-ins with the authorities over technical issues of passport registration, and must respect the new regulations on photographs.

### **Special Requests**

As you build relationships and memories with kids, teachers, translators, and staff members we realize you may want to see these people each time you travel to the country. This is a natural

reaction and the way all of us build relationships. Often, travelers contact our Colorado office and even our national staff with special requests to take side trips to their favorite orphanages, which do not appear on the team's trip agenda.

We appreciate your special requests. However, with the ever-increasing number of volunteers who travel with us each year, honoring these special requests is becoming more and more difficult. Special requests often mean a more expensive land package for you and/or your group. If you have a special request, please contact your team leader at least 60 days in advance of your departure date. Your team leader will, in turn, contact the Colorado office. While we will try to honor each person's request, please understand that we will not be able to make each one work. This has become a challenge to our overseas staff and one they are very concerned about.

One thing to keep in mind as you travel is that Children's HopeChest's national staff has already spent hours gaining the proper permissions and making all arrangements for the finalized trip itineraries. **Once in country, please do not ask the staff to honor a special request that was not worked out with the Colorado office prior to arrival in their country.** As Americans, we are accustomed to making snap decisions and spur-of-the-moment changes. This is not always the case overseas. Though it appears that these last-minute requests are easy to honor, closer scrutiny will reveal how our national staff have to scramble to gain all necessary approvals from government and orphanage officials in order to change plans.

Please know we are striving to give you the best experience possible. As HopeChest ambassadors, we ask that you honor your set itinerary, be humble guests and acknowledge cultural differences between our countries.

### **Individual Trips**

Along with the number of special requests, Children's HopeChest receives many inquiries for people wanting to travel overseas on their own. Our focus is to service church and business groups overseas and therefore individual trips are not part of our vision and cannot be arranged.

### **Sponsored Child/Graduate Requests**

As the camp season draws near each year, we are inundated with requests that certain children be at certain camps. While we understand your love of these special kids (we share in that love!) and your desire to spend two weeks with them at camp, please understand that Children's HopeChest has little input into and no advance notice of which children will attend our camps. Some orphanage kids, in fact, will attend the state-run camps instead of ours. That decision rests entirely with the orphanage directors and staff as well as the Ministry of Education.

The same applies to sponsored children and orphan graduates. Many times, churches that are sponsoring an orphanage go on trips expecting to see their sponsored children or the graduates of that orphanage on each trip. We cannot guarantee that this will happen as the whereabouts of graduates always change. For sponsored children, there is a good chance that they will be at the orphanage when the team arrives, but it should not be an expectation that they will be there. Many times, children have relatives that they visit on national holidays which is when volunteers often travel. Please understand up front that we cannot guarantee which kids your team will see at the orphanage or ministry centers.

### **Visiting Orphanages**

Most volunteers have a common and natural desire to visit the orphanages where their favorite kids reside. Please understand that by law through the Ministry of Education, orphans rarely spend the summer in their orphanages. (June – August) Children are placed in various sanatoriums, state-run or private camps, or even the homes of distant relatives. Emptying the orphanage serves two practical purposes. First, it allows vacation time to all orphanage workers and teachers. Second, it allows much-needed repairs to be made on the facilities themselves. For these reasons, during the summer, requests to visit orphanages are often denied.

### **Day Camps at Orphanages**

Day camps are positive experiences for groups, especially those that have already sponsored an orphanage or that are considering orphanage sponsorship, providing unique opportunities that camp facilities do not. It allows volunteers to: 1) experience kids in their own environment and spend concentrated time with them, 2) meet and minister to the entire staff that cares for these children on a daily basis, 3) be a positive influence within the community where the children live.

## **Ordering and purchasing Bibles**

Many of our sponsoring churches /businesses express a desire to provide Bibles for the kids when they visit the orphanage. We really appreciate your willingness to do this. I wanted to let you know about a few new opportunities we have in regards to purchasing Bibles for your orphanage.

We have a great opportunity to get Bibles from the local churches in the regional cities we work in. We want to start developing relationships with these local churches. The Bibles that will be ordered are similar in context to the New King James version and are approved by the Orthodox Church. This is the best way to build strong relationships with the Orthodox churches. Ira Scionka, in our office, will be your contact for ordering Bibles and any questions you may have. ([iscionka@hopechest.org](mailto:iscionka@hopechest.org)) Below are the instructions for ordering Bibles:

Step 1: If you would like to order Bibles, we can get an accurate amount needed from the orphanage. Let us know **2 months** in advance about your plans. We are unable to get Bibles after this point and we must receive payment immediately. Failure to do so will result in Bibles not being ordered or delivered in time.

Step 2: The cost of a Bible is approximately \$12 each. This may vary between locations. We will place the order with a local church. The cost of the Bibles will be added to your total trip cost which will be reflected on your final invoice which you will receive about six weeks prior to leaving.

Step 3: You will pick up the Bibles on your way to the orphanage.

## **New Law with Travel Agencies (New! Russia only)**

Effective June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 a new law was passed in Russia that requires all tourist buses or vans carrying foreign travelers must be off the road no later than 10 p.m. Children's HopeChest arranges all transportation for our groups through a national Travel Agency. This is a safety precaution across all of Russia. Due to some recent robberies of tourist being on the road late at night-this new law came to pass. Please take this into consideration while planning your itinerary with Children's HopeChest and please abide by this new law. When our staff says it's time to go, is to the driver can get you to your next destination in time and not violate this new rule.

## **Meals in Orphanages (New! Russia Only)**

Effective April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 Ivanovo Region issued a new rule that only the children in the orphanages are able to be served food. This means that none of our teams, translators, or orphanage staff are able to eat any meals at the orphanage in Ivanovo Region. If your group will be traveling to Ivanovo region, other arrangements for meals will be made by our staff in country and we will do our best to make this as simple as possible and still maximize your time with the children.

## **Leaving Cash (New!)**

While teams are in country they see so many needs and opportunities to help. It is a natural reaction to want to leave cash with a translator or a staff member for a specific child or project at the orphanage. We must strongly prohibit this. Russia is putting Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's) under tight observance to make sure that funds are being spent appropriately. It has always been our policy to not allow teams to leave funds in country with a staff member or translator. The scrutiny with NGO's is so strong that we must enforce this. If you have money left over from your trip, do not leave it in Russia. Please send it directly to our Colorado office and talk with the appropriate staff member here and we will help the process for getting project ideas and special gifts approved. The money will be sent over through the appropriate accounting structure and systems we have in place with our national staff and orphanage directors. It is not

allowed to leave money with a child, translator or staff member for a specific child or project or gift to the orphanage.