



Frequently Asked Questions

How long has the program been running?

The YMCA Global Teens Program has been in existence since 1996. Many of the host sites have been hosts since that time and we have gone to sites such as South Korea, Thailand, and Costa Rica for three years or more. South Dakota has also been a very successful site for the past three summers.

How are sites selected?

Each of the host sites is a YMCA in the country we visit. Sites are selected for their experience in working with youth and providing strong leadership and community service opportunities. Each program is carefully negotiated and in each case a visit takes place before the travel begins. During each of these visits, we cover safety and emergency procedures, and have worked to effectively communicate the goals and objectives for our partnerships.

Who are the advisors?

Advisors are chosen from a variety of sources. We look for individuals over the age of 23 who have strong experiences working with teens, have participated in travel abroad and are flexible enough to meet the demands of this program. In the past, leaders have included YMCA staff, teachers, and social workers.

When should we get a passport? Who is responsible for the participant's passport?

Participants should apply for a passport as soon as they are accepted if not before. The process takes about 6 weeks and during the summer there may be delays depending on how late the application is made. If a participant is not an American citizen, a visa is often required. This also takes time and applications should be made well in advance of travel. Copies of participant passports are kept on file and Leaders carry an extra copy with them. In most cases, the leaders will keep the passports locked in a safe place until needed.

What type of travel insurance do we provide and what should the participants have?

The International YMCA will carry evacuation insurance for each of the Global Teens Groups. This will cover the costs for evacuating a participant or the entire group outside of the country. It is important to remember that the participant, the parents, or the YMCA cannot determine when an evacuation is necessary. A committee comprised of doctors and administrators from the Travel Insurance Company will make that determination. This practice is an insurance industry standard, and we have not been able to find an insurance plan that would put those controls in our hands. If participants need to see a doctor, arrangements will be made to seek appropriate medical attention.

If there is something that we forgot to include on the health form, what should we do?

Send an email to decheverry@ymcanyc.org and describe the health concern. We will add the information to the health record. It is critical that we have complete health information on every form. This is the only form that our leaders will have with them, and we will respond much more effectively if we have information in advance.

Who is responsible for medication?

Advisors will keep all medications, both over-the-counter and prescriptions required by participants and document its use.

Can you get refills for prescriptions easily in host countries?

No. Make sure that the participant has enough medication to last the entire program and also some extra just in case. Bring along the doctor's prescription for medication and glasses, but know that it is easier to bring extra than to attain them in a different country.

Can a vegetarian participant be accommodated in host countries? What about other dietary restrictions?

Yes. Make sure that you inform us BEFORE leaving so that we can inform home stay families and our YMCA partners to avoid any cultural misunderstandings. This is also true for any other food issues including allergies.

What is your alcohol policy?

The orientation period will be used for group bonding and getting prepared for the Global Teens adventure. Group and advisor goals and expectations will be discussed along with issues of cultural sensitivity and responsibility. Some non-negotiable rules will be explained, including that the use of alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, or sexual activity. Participants who fail to comply by these rules will be dismissed from the program and sent home.

How can a participant not drink alcohol if it is part of the culture?

We have had very direct conversations with our partners regarding our policy around alcohol, and will include our policy and our rationale behind it in our orientations with host families. It is our belief that cultural sharing should go both ways, and that it is inappropriate for our participants to adopt new behaviors that would not be appropriate in their own culture. We expect our participants to politely decline alcohol, and focus on other opportunities to share in the host culture.

What is your policy on swimming?

Swimming is only permitted when there is a certified lifeguard present.

What is appropriate dress in host countries?

Since you will be representing the International YMCA and the USA, it is our recommendation that participants wear clean, comfortable clothing that is fairly modest. At least one neat pair of long pants and a long-sleeve shirt will be needed. In Thailand, women should not wear shorts that are above the knee, or tank tops.

What do you recommend for luggage?

We recommend a large to medium internal frame backpack, to the participants. The participants will be responsible for carrying their own luggage and it is important to pack light and test your pack out before leaving. We also recommend a small daypack for day hikes and possible excursions.

What type of sleeping bag do we need?

Sleeping bags with stuff sacks are easier to pack and usually can fit right into your backpack. There is no need to buy the top of the line, -100 degree bag unless you plan to do some serious camping after the Global Teens Program. A -20 degree bag will do just fine. In Thailand and Korea we also recommend a sheet sack for those hot and humid nights.

What type of camera should the participants bring?

While it is important to document this extraordinary experience, families must also remember that anything expensive tends to draw attention and may end up broken or missing. A small camera or disposable cameras will work just fine for this program. Participants can bring more expensive camera, but should keep in mind that they will be responsible for this equipment and cope with possible losses.

Are hiking boots a good idea?

Yes. A good lightweight boot can always be useful whether it is for day hikes or trekking around a city.

Does the program provide bottled water?

Yes, safe drinking water will always be available to the participants.

Do you allow participants to bring an iPod or a cell phone?

No, we feel that walkmans and cell phones will separate participants from the rest of the group. We encourage participants to bring CDs in order to share favorite music.

How much money should a participant bring? What do they have to spend money on?

You may bring up to \$250 in spending money. The program covers all meals and program expenses, so all of your needs will be met during the trip. Your spending money can be used for souvenirs, snacks or anything extra you may wish to purchase.

Are traveler's checks the best currency or ATM's?

Traveler's checks can be used in any of the destinations we travel to. It is our recommendation that traveler's checks be purchased in smaller denominations. Parents/guardians should discuss spending money with participants. At no time should extra money be sent. Waiting for money transfers can cause delays and teaches young people nothing about the finer art of budgeting.

How long is the flight to each destination?

While our sites change from year to year, below is a quick list of our recent host sites and the approximate travel time to each:

Hong Kong, Thailand, South Korea, & The Gambia	Approximately 20 hours
Ecuador & Spain	Approximately 7 hours
Costa Rica	Approximately 5 hours
South Dakota	Approximately 2 ½ hours

What is the communication with participants?

All participants will make an initial telephone call to let parents/guardians know that they have arrived safely. After that, we request that direct communication occur only halfway through the trip, and the night before returning home. Based on our experience, this is the best way to get the maximum benefit from the program. In addition, we will communicate by email or the regular mail system. We will also ask each participant to write home at least once. Please remember the in case of a family emergency, the International YMCA has a 24 hour emergency telephone system and we can get in touch with any group member at all times.

How much "free" time will they have in cities?

The Global Teens Program is essentially a group experience, with structured activities that are supervised by our leaders. Participants will be involved with group decision-making, and will be given opportunities to join small group activities on their own with clear parameters. Participants will also be on the "Buddy System". Four teens will be linked together so that if something happens to one participant, another stays behind, and the other two go for help.

What is the screening process for home stay families?

Our YMCA hosts will help us to identify families that are members of their YMCA, or are personally known by their staff or volunteers. Many of our home stay families have been hosting our groups year after year, so they are very well versed in how to make our participants feel at home.

What will they do when they are with the home stay families?

This is the part of the program that differentiates our program from a tourist experience, where participants get to experience the daily lives of families in another culture. Meal times, short hikes, and personal tours of your host family's favorite part of their community is where you will learn the "real" culture of the country. It is important that participants actively join in, and be willing to make a sincere effort to try new things, especially the language of the country you are visiting. The host family experience will vary with each country. Sometimes participants will stay with the families in the evenings and for breakfast and then meet up with the entire group during the daytime periods, others will stay with the families for the entire experience. Home stays vary from 2-3 days or longer. It is important to note that while we make every effort to include the home stay experience in each of our trips, it is not always possible. Each group will however have interactions with peers and meet groups of people in a variety of settings in the host culture.

Do the home stay families speak English?

That is not a requirement for the program and there will be families that do not speak English. Since we are visiting their country it is important for participants to try to speak the host country language. We recommend buying a phrase book and practicing before your arrival to camp. Each group will go over some useful phrases helpful in to them in the countries they visit.

Do they meet during the day on their home stay?

Global Teen Participants will get together some of the days to do group activities. Based on past itineraries, it is reasonable to assume that participants will get together at least every third day during a home stay, and usually more frequently.

How many hours of community service are there in each destination?

The length of service projects varies in each country, but our goal is to have service projects for 5-7 days of the trip.

What are the service projects in each destination?

The service projects for this summer are currently under construction. We work with our partners to provide a service to the host community that changes every year depending on the need of the community. Some past service projects have included visiting and cleaning orphanages in Thailand, running a summer camp program for young children in Mexico, working with seniors in Korea, and re-forestation in Venezuela. A more detailed description of this summer's service projects will be sent out in future mailings.

Will we get a detailed itinerary?

Each participant's parent(s) will receive a Parent Packet filled with important information, including the itinerary, packing list, departure/arrival procedures, and emergency contact information.