2013

A New Model: Improving Adult Experiences in The Holy Land With Effective Pre-Departure Information, Resources and Procedures

Sarah A. Loan
SIT Graduate Institute

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A NEW MODEL:
IMPROVING ADULT EXPERIENCES IN THE HOLY LAND
WITH EFFECTIVE PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION,
RESOURCES AND PROCEDURES

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PIM70

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts
in International Education at the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA
July 21, 2013

Advisor: Janet Y. Thomas, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

Since September 11, 2001, Group Travel Directors (GTD) has noted an increase in self-reported anxiety among adult travelers preparing to depart to the Holy Land. This observation has been made by long-term employees both objectively and subjectively by comparing evaluation scores, cancellation percentages, tracking numbers of phone calls from anxious travelers and through staff accounts of conversations with travelers. GTD staff reports that clients often are inclined to make rash decisions based on perfunctory judgments influenced by media coverage.

GTD has collected evaluations from adult travelers for more than twenty years in an effort to better understand traveler perceptions of tours and to amass accolades or acrimonious feedback. To date, no major institutional changes have resulted from a collective study of the years of feedback that exist in GTD’s files. The purpose of this project is to compile and examine this feedback from Holy Land travelers between the years 2010 and 2013, to recommended changes and to make improvements to GTD’s pre-departure materials and procedures based on consistent themes within traveler evaluations.

The information extracted from these evaluations concludes there are improvements that must be made to GTD’s Pre-Departure process to empower and inform adult travelers to recognize and combat culture shock, to be more knowledgeable about cultural and religious differences in the region, and to be more interested in driving his or her own learning prior to a tour’s departure. Evaluations also reveal that group leader materials should be improved, updated and available electronically. Procedures to improve communication timing, quality and availability are also examined and implemented.
Group Travel Directors

Company Scope & History

Group Travel Directors (GTD) is an internationally recognized, Minnesota-based small company excelling in custom designed tours for special interest groups, such as academic, faith-based and organization-oriented group travel. A distinguishing characteristic of GTD is every tour is developed around the group leader’s chosen focus or mission statement. An itinerary is never repeated which results in varied experiences for travelers, group leaders and GTD employees.

Founded in 1982 by company president, Kate Peer, GTD’s first contract was to design the performing tour for the first university music ensemble from the United States to enter China since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Shortly after this first exchange, GTD began designing tours for college professors who wanted to take students behind the Iron Curtain of East Germany and into Palestine. Since 1982, GTD has designed thousands of tours for students and adults to destinations on every continent.

Company Mission

GTD’s Mission Statement represents the driving force company.

“The business of Group Travel Directors is to bring together people and places through quality programming and planning. By building strong relationships the world over, we deliver experiences with global perspective. We conduct business with honesty and integrity. Our philosophy is that of respect and appreciation toward those associated with our company. As we succeed in our mission, we share prosperity with employees and the communities we serve” (GTD Employee Handbook, 2012).

GTD also has an idiosyncratic interest in social justice and areas of the world that are typically difficult for American citizens to access such as Palestine, Cuba, Iraq, Egypt and, historically, China, Russia and East Germany.
As a Customer Service Specialist (CSS), Sarah Loan is responsible for overseeing the traveler and itinerary details from traveler registrations until the post-departure evaluations are sent. This job includes interacting with travelers for the duration of the tour development, handling air, health, rooming, on-the-ground transportation and any tour related details or special requests. The CSS also implements all necessary arrangements to ensure the integrity of the original itinerary is maintained.

Culturally, GTD is made up almost entirely of upper-middle class white women between the ages of 40-60. It is important to note this staff demographic is representative of GTD’s client demographic. Though the staff population is relatively homogenous is age and appearance, there is a diverse background in careers, international experiences and skill sets. From teachers and professors, musicians, artists, directors, IT professionals, professional gardeners, histories and linguists, GTD’s staff is a population of assorted perspectives and talents. Collectively, the staff has lived in or visited three-quarters of the countries in the world and, due to the longevity of the company and employees, GTD has developed meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with its in-country partners, especially in the Holy Land.

**What is Social Justice?**

Academic definitions of social justice vary from the concrete to the unrealistically utopian. John Rawls, one of the early intellectuals to examine social justice theory explained his position using two primary principles:

- Each individual should have the right to a comprehensive set of equal basic liberties which are compatible with the liberties of all within society. (Rawls, 2003, p. 42)
- Public offices and work positions should be achievable by all under fair conditions, which would be the greatest benefit to the lower classes. (Rawls, 2003, p. 43)

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1 Tours can take up to 24 months to develop.
Rawls expands on his ideas using the concept of “primary goods” which he defines as “what is required by persons … to be fully cooperating members of society.” Examples of these goods include:

- Freedom of thought, liberty of choice, etc.
- Freedom of movement
- Representation and power in office
- Economic viability
- Opportunities for self-respect based in self-worth and the ability to be self-sustaining (Rawls, 2003, p. 58-59)

According to Rawls, individuals who are denied any of the five primary goods listed above exist in an unjust or oppressive environment. Often, this oppression is institutionalized and enforced by the dominant political or ethnic group (Rawls, 2003, p. 74).

**Social Justice and Holy Land Travel**

While many companies in the United States offer tours to the Holy Land, there are very few organizations who promote custom tours, focused on each side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This real-world encounter is paramount to the GTD tour experience. As previously mentioned, Holy Land group leaders tend to be pastors, reverends or priests. As religious leaders, these men and women often have an intense interest in social justice in Israel and Palestine.

“The Holy Land has an incredible power and elicits strong emotions. Even in times when tensions are high in the Middle East, travelers still go. Few destinations carry that kind of power or significance in a person’s life. Bethlehem played such a critical role in the life of Jesus; in a strange way, it is a blessing Bethlehem is in Palestine because it gives GTD a irrefutable reason to suggest groups to Israel AND Palestine when some of our group leaders would likely avoid Palestine due to perceptions in the main-stream media. I believe it is important to encourage group leaders to let travelers experience both sides of the wall. I believe it is important to show as many people we can the reality of the people living in both countries – that is a much more powerful experience than any book, movie or discussion about Israel and Palestine could convey” (Loan, 2013).

Over the years, GTD has helped to connect thousands of travelers to both Israel and Palestine by encouraging travelers to be more than a “tourist” and to really experience the people of the region.
GTD’s roots in the Holy Land run deep, allowing representatives to present potential group leaders with a wide range of activities, special speakers, service projects or intercultural/interfaith dialogues.

Some common experiences our group leaders will select for travelers will be to:

- Visit a Refugee Camp and have tea with some of the refugees
- Visit a Settlement and meet with community representatives
- Visit Interfaith schools, universities and hospitals
- Meet with representatives from Lutheran World Federation (LWF) or the YMCA Rehabilitation Program
- Tour a weaving, small business or farming cooperative
- Harvest olives and plant trees among Palestinian families
- Speak with Israeli and Palestinian parents who have lost children in the conflict
- Meet with local leaders in the Jewish, Islamic and Christian traditions
- Worship with Israeli or Palestinian Christians, Jews or Muslims

By raising awareness of the quality of life, opinions, beliefs, religions and people of the Holy Land, GTD has established a long-standing reputation of balance and professionalism in both Israel and Palestine. It is the desire of the staff of GTD that the work done on Holy Land tours will help to foster a new dialogue and more informed, insightful perspectives on Holy Land foreign policy in the United States.

As a tour is being developed, group leaders talk over goals, values and a mission statement with GTD’s staff. Itinerary development is a complex process, as the GTD representative must always have his or her antennae tuned to the comfort-level and political leanings of the group leader. Draft itineraries are developed and finally, group leaders and representatives add in special interest visits in accordance to the group’s needs or mission. Service projects, worship services and speakers or events will also be worked into the itinerary, allowing travelers a more in-depth, authentic experience.

A balanced tour is difficult to achieve. “There is so much that could be covered in the Holy Land,” says Peer, “and group leaders tend to want to do it all – seeing historical sites, spending time with the people, discussing social justice and engaging in service projects. It’s hard to tell [group leaders] they will have to choose because their days are too full” (Loan, 2013). Often, the items that...
are cut from the itinerary due to timing issues are the social justice focused activities, rather than the tourist sites.

**Fair and Balanced?**

There are many challenges to promoting and creating tours to represent both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first reality GTD representatives must accept is that the tour ultimately is designed in accordance with the group leader’s wishes, perspective and mission. This can mean that a tour may only focus on one side of the conflict and highlight the plight of only one group of people, despite the representative’s personal beliefs. When this occurs, GTD must be diligent in sending relevant information to these groups referring to only one group or the other. This is a time-consuming process in addition to being outside of the company’s normal mission.

Additionally, a group leader’s background can complicate tour planning; the freedom to custom design tours can challenge vocabularies and lead to miscommunications. For example, the terms “balanced” or “equality” mean different things to different people and are often influenced by an individual’s personal background, economic status, religious beliefs, etc. With GTD, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian groups tend to be very interested in the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians and often wish to visit interfaith peace-building NGOs in the area.

While it is obvious that an individual cannot achieve a comprehensive understanding of a country, its people and its history in a matter of weeks, it is important to note that building understanding and open-mindedness must start somewhere. Fears and anxieties rooted in general ignorance often arise in adult travelers prior to departure. This behavior carries a bit of irony as it is adults who tell children it is not acceptable to make up his or her mind about a food until it is eaten, a person until they are known, or a place until it has been visited. Unfortunately, adults do not hold themselves to the same standard of open-mindedness.
**Researcher Goals & Objectives**

For two years, I have been using my professional skills to organize tour logistics, actively problem solve, and develop new materials for staff and clients while interacting with clients on a daily basis. Through evaluation-based research I have determined areas for improvement in GTD’s Holy Land process and materials. Using this information, I hope to improve evaluation scores in the following areas:

- Materials distributed by GTD
- Traveler perceptions (in the form of ratings) of the overall value of the tour
- Travelers feeling ‘prepared’ to encounter the cultural and religious differences of the Holy Land

By focusing on these topics, I hope to minimize traveler anxiety, culture shock and decrease participant cancellation rates during times of political tension. The ultimate goal will be to foster active, inspired learning and open minds for adult travelers who are preparing to visit the Holy Land.

As tensions rose in the Middle East at the end of 2012, GTD saw a marked increase in travelers reporting feeling “unprepared” for traveling to the Holy Land. Panicked phone calls and traveler cancellations rose while scores for GTD’s pre-departure materials and information fell. GTD staff unanimously agreed that stress among groups was palpable. To examine this phenomenon, and what can be done to prevent a future event I will:

- Compile evaluations ratings and comments
- Examine trends in feedback
- Present recommended areas of improvement to the President of GTD
- Rework all necessary materials and processes determined by client evaluations

Recommendations for these four points will be made based on the knowledge, skills and expertise gained in the International Education course “Design, Delivery and Evaluation” taken on the School for International Training’s (SIT) campus during the 2011 academic year.
In, *The Guide to Successful Short-term Programs Abroad*, Spencer and Tuma write, “a well planned and executed Pre-Departure program ultimately makes short-term experiences abroad more meaningful personally and intellectually to the [adults] who take part in them” (2007). GTD representatives have witnessed how GTD has suffered and benefited from the effects of effective or ineffective Pre-Departure planning. This dichotomy of the quality of Pre-Departure information and activities is due to the highly individualized nature of GTD’s groups\(^2\), GTD, historically, has operated with the assumption that a group leader prepares his or her travelers for the Holy Land experience based on the group mission.\(^3\) However, evaluations sent to travelers after a group returns often suggest that Pre-Departure information should cover more, could be better timed, and more relevant to the Holy Land. This feedback indicates that both group leaders and GTD can improve information going to travelers.

**Researcher Subjectivity and Analysis**

As a tour designer who strives to create balanced tours reflecting the positions of Israel and Palestine, I am aware of the importance of examining my personal beliefs in the context of GTD’s overall goals. My educational background in world religions and psychology, as well as my years as a teacher overseas influences my suggestions for group leader materials. My personal beliefs regarding US involvement in the Middle East, as well as my sympathies to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories influence my perspective. I am also affected by my assumptions regarding baseline abilities for intercultural communication or interfaith dialogue among adults.

With the knowledge there will be no great panacea for these shortcomings, coworkers and GTD senior management will be involved in the development of all materials to ensure suggestions are as free from bias as possible and representative of diverse perspectives.

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\(^2\) Each GTD tour is custom designed according to the group leader’s mission statement.

\(^3\) The Group Leader Handbook (produced by GTD in 1995) contains a one paragraph section on preparing travelers that says, “Consider your group’s mission and consider organizing some pre-departure activities that are related to your theme.”
Literature Review

The inclusion of Kalervo Oberg’s 1960s foundational research on culture shock is to illustrate the “newness” of the concept of culture shock to the world of psychology and, more importantly, to the general public. When one considers the average age of GTD’s travelers to the Holy Land (55+), it is easy to see how culture shock may still be an unfamiliar concept to adult travelers. Oberg’s research, although groundbreaking, is, in my opinion, not robust enough to stand alone, especially in the age of technology, instant communication and social media.

In an effort to present more up-to-date information on culture shock I have elected to include the work of Louise Stewart and Peter Leggat to illustrate additional factors that can influence the likelihood of a traveler to be at risk of extreme culture shock. According to Stewart and Leggat, GTD travelers are “at risk” in all six of the “potential factors” categories, reaffirming the need to address culture shock among GTD group leaders and travelers.

Because perceptions of Islam have been a growing concern among Americans since 9/11, which corresponds to an increase in traveler cancellations due to anxiety over safety, it was important to address this social paradigm. When considering what research to include for this paper, it became apparent that much of the research about the perception of Islam in the United States comes to a similar three-point conclusion:

1. Islam is viewed more and more commonly, as a religion of violence.
2. American Christians know very little about basic teachings and Islamic doctrine.
3. A dramatic increase of “non-descript Arab or ‘Islamic’” characters have been appearing in television and movies over the last 20 years, with the sharpest increase happening post-9/11. This reaffirms the necessity to include ideas and resources in group leader materials to educate adult travelers about Islam and Arab cultures.

Finally, an area I would like to suggest for further research is more focused studies on ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism among the diverse American economic classes. Multiple studies,
including those from Geert Hofstede, Peter Honey and Alan Mumford, suggest upper class citizens, despite their higher level of education, adapt least to a new culture and therefore suffer most from culture shock upon entry.

Needs Assessment

GTD’s Former Processes

Historically, communication with travelers has been limited. Upon registration, the traveler receives a welcome letter containing general information regarding passport requirements, payment schedules and a current flight itinerary. After this letter, there is no communication directly from GTD until final billing (90 days prior to departure). At 180, 150 and 120 days prior to departure, a GTD representative will communicate with the group leader regarding group numbers and any specific information the group leader should be aware of regarding air schedule changes, etc. Resources for the region have been distributed by group leaders. The GTD representative assigned to the tour may send relevant news stories or articles about the Holy Land as he or she comes across the material, but this is an informal, unregulated practice and group leaders may or may not pass this information along to travelers. Final documents, which include a GTD trademarked document called the “Pocket Documents” are sent 21 days prior to departure.4

A Pre-Departure Orientation is held around 21 days prior to departure. This presentation is what Friere described as the “banking” education system (1990), with a GTD representative making a one hour presentation5, the group leader often will offer some subsequent information and finally,

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4 The Pocket Documents include the following information: A Welcome Statement, GTD’s Mission Statement, Airport Procedures, Departure Information, Seat Assignments, Time Differences, Weather Information, Communication Tips, Currency Recommendations, Baggage Allowances, Embassy Registration Instructions, Customs and Tipping Information, Frequent Flyer Information, Day-by-Day Itinerary, Accommodations List, Rooming Lists, Basic Conversions and space for taking notes.

5 Information covered in GTD’s presentations include: Passport tips, Flights, Security Info for Tel Aviv, Baggage/TSA Allowances, Packing Tips, Time and Weather Information, Wifi/Internet Availability, Maps,
there is time for questions at the end of the evening. After the Pre-Departure presentation, group leaders and GTD staff respond to questions from the group. Time to get to know each other follows the meeting.

**Analysis of GTD’s Current Processes**

Despite the comprehensive presentation provided in the final 21 days prior to departure, traveler evaluations indicate that materials are insufficient and information and resources should be distributed or available sooner in an intentional, systematic way. Current work processes have information delivered in a hierarchical “top-down” approach. Little communication comes directly from GTD between the welcome letter and the final documents, a span of approximately five months. Historically, no materials have been circulated which may be used to promote self-directed learning and curiosity for travelers who may already foster an internal curiosity regarding the Holy Land. Unless a group leader has a background in education, there is little chance he or she will have the resources or the training to generate synergistic group dynamics or a sense of camaraderie.

**Determining Necessary Changes: Traveler Evaluations**

As a company specializing in custom designed tours, a careful analysis of what was successful and what needs to be improved is a serious and time-consuming matter. Programmers, Air and Land Purchasers and Customer Service Specialists pay careful attention to logistical details, noting what was learned along the way to help others work more effectively and efficiently in the future. Group leaders are interviewed by GTD representatives upon re-entry to get both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the overall tour experience. Each compliment and complaint is

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Health/Food/Water Information, Shopping Suggestions, Embassy Registration Instructions, Photos of the hotels, Safety and Guide Information, a few works in Hebrew and Arabic and Electricity Details
discussed and examined by the affected departments. Changes are made to upcoming itineraries that may be affected by similar conditions.

For many years, travelers received a paper evaluation in the mail approximately one week after reentry. In this evaluation, travelers were asked to rate and to comment on his or her experiences while on program and his or her perception of GTD. The categories covered by the evaluation focus on six topics:

1. Whom You Met
2. Where You Stayed
3. What You Saw & Did
4. How You Traveled
5. Your Group Leader
6. How GTD Served You

Each topic was subdivided into specific examples related to each heading. For example, the “Whom You Met” section will ask for feedback on the Tour Guide(s), Driver(s), Speaker(s), Local Tour Guide(s), Workshop leader(s), Teacher(s), etc. Travelers were then asked to rate each item on the evaluation and were provided space to add additional comments. Ratings were based on a 1 to 5 scale; a rating of “1” signifies an “Unsatisfactory” experience while a 5 indicates an “Outstanding” rating. Travelers were asked to complete these forms and return them via mail within 45 days of return. Approximately 40 percent of travelers returned paper evaluations post-tour.

Once received, evaluation feedback is compiled, distributed, discussed and finally reported to our in-country partners. High marks are highlighted, praised and are viewed as a harbinger for suggestions of activities, speakers, hotels and other details to future group leaders. Low scores are examined, addressed and changes are made, if necessary, to future groups’ itineraries based on positive or negative experiences by our previous travelers. Phone calls are made to any travelers who submitted low scores to the company in an effort to understand feedback more thoroughly and to ensure travelers know they have been heard.
Since 2011, GTD has been moving toward becoming a “paperless” company. As a part of this transition, an electronic, email based evaluation was developed in 2012. The electronic evaluation process is nearly identical to the original evaluation procedure with small variations to account for the use of technology and social media. Travelers receive a “Welcome Home” email on the day they return and a link to his or her private evaluation along with an invitation to “like” GTD on Facebook and a suggestion to share a favorite photo or story.

Traveler reactions to the adoption of electronic evaluations have been extremely positive. GTD has also seen a dramatic rise in evaluation response rates with approximately 75 percent of travelers returning electronic evaluations. Completion time has also decreased dramatically with 87 percent of evaluations being completed within two weeks of re-entry. Travelers who have not completed his or her survey within two weeks of reentry receive a reminder email 15 days after his or her return. Evaluation links remain active for 45 days post-reentry.

**Evaluation Results**

Holy Land tours comprise a large portion of GTD’s annual business. Between 2011 and 2013, 46 percent of Group Travel Directors (GTD) groups traveled to the Holy Land (Israel and Palestine). Of these travelers, approximately 78 percent were over the age of 45. Each year, GTD sends dozens of adult groups to the Holy Land. Although some groups are comprised of university students or seminarians, often, the groups share similar demographics: middle-aged or retired, middle or upper-class European Americans from urban areas within the United States.

Since 2010, GTD has received 217 evaluations from Holy Land travelers. The scores given by these travelers were compiled and revealed that 55 percent of Holy Land travelers rated GTD as “Outstanding” while responding to the question “GTD’s staff was friendly, knowledgeable and responsive.” Thirty-five percent of participants rated experiences with GTD’s staff as “Exceeding
Expectations” and ten percent scored staff as “Meeting their Expectations.” Of the 217 evaluations, there were no ratings of “2” (Needing Improvement) or “1” (Unsatisfactory).

Travelers also rated the quality of materials with the prompt “GTD’s information and materials were helpful for me.” For this section, ratings were lower; only thirty-eight percent of travelers rating the materials/information were “Outstanding.” Forty percent of travelers rated the information as “Exceeding Expectations.” Twenty-one percent reported materials as “Meeting Expectations” and one percent responded saying materials and information “Need Improvement.” No travelers rated GTD’s materials as “Unsatisfactory.”

A direct relationship was apparent between the rating of the information/materials and the evaluation prompts “The tour was a good value” and “The tour met my expectations.” Travelers who gave lower ratings to the materials (2s and 3s) were more likely to give lower scores to both of these categories while still rating GTD’s staff as “Outstanding.”

**Evaluation Analysis & Limitations**

In keeping with GTD’s goals of providing exceptional international opportunities and based on traveler comments and quantifiable data, it is recommended that the timing, quality, content and delivery methods of current Pre-Departure materials be examined and improved. Based on the direct relationship that was observed in the data between the quality of the Pre-Departure materials and the perception of the overall value of the tour, implementing improved materials will help to improve the overall perception of GTD and support the company-wide goal of creating future group leaders from every group.

The evaluation results indicate travelers feel there are areas not currently addressed in GTD’s materials and information that should be provided prior to departure. Areas that are mentioned for improvement are religion, culture, language, packing and technology. Twelve percent of travelers
who commented requested more information earlier and that GTD should use email or an improved website to make information accessible in a timely manner. Suggestions for improvements range from the specific, such as “Please update your packing list” and “Please email this information earlier” to abstract references to cultural differences the traveler was not prepared to encounter. For example, “The driver, although he seemed very nice, would not shake my wife’s hand when she offered it; I thought this was very rude.”

There are limitations to this study that are worth noting. The low return rate of the physical evaluations, which were still being used in 2010 and 2011, means data is weighted toward 2012. Hand-written evaluations often do not include as much detail as electronic evaluations, as participants are more likely to elaborate on comments and stories when he or she types feedback rather than writes it by hand. Additionally, the timeliness of the response often influences the tone of the evaluation. For example, a traveler who fills out an evaluation within 48 hours of returning may focus on a delayed flight rather than talking about the tour on a whole due to a shorter processing time.

**Recommendations for Improvements based on Evaluation Feedback**

Traveler evaluations have presented GTD with consistent themes regarding possible areas of improvement. The following list reflects possible areas of improvement based on the comments which were made more than ten times within the 217 evaluations considered for this review:

- Provide a reading/website list to group leaders and/or travelers
- Create and provide a movie or documentary list for group leaders and/or travelers and incorporate its use in the GTD work process
- Update and provide a “Recommended Apps list” for group leaders and/or travelers
- Improve packing list

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6 It is important to bear in mind that 2012 was a year of heightened tensions in Israel and Palestine during the Israeli elections.
• Encourage group leaders to supplement GTD’s information by suggesting how to utilize other forms of information such as emails, books, films, discussions, speakers, blogs, music, food, activities, etc.

• Encourage multiple group gatherings prior to departure so that travelers can get to know each other and learn more about the Holy Land.

• Give written descriptions of what is appropriate to wear at various holy sites in the Holy Land (temples/mosques/churches).

• Include information on how much walking will be necessary in the Holy Land.

• Provide some key words in languages and basic intercultural communication skills, as well as information on Palestinian and Israeli cultural/communication customs well in advance for travelers to learn if they are interested.

• Create a “wish list” of what different organizations may need in terms of donations. Some groups may wish to take items (books, laptops, school/art supplies)

• Suggest local resources (film festivals, restaurants, religious organizations or sites, speakers, etc) that could be visited prior to departure.

Implementing these recommendations will be discussed in the subsequent sections and will address these changes in the light of academic theory and practical application. GTD has begun to work on creating and implementing many of these changes, including a new reading, film and recommended apps list.

It is also recommended that GTD develop strategies to empower group leaders to encourage intercultural communication and learning, to provide more relevant information and to educate and prepare his or her travelers for the symptoms and effects of culture shock. The increased use of technology, email and social media ensures these changes would be inexpensive to develop and distribute. Finally, many travelers alluded to making better use of technology to disseminate information prior to traveling. GTD’s outdated website is often referenced and in need of updating to a more user-friendly interface that would invite more interaction from travelers. An app could also be developed to deliver notifications regarding sites the group will be visiting, weather or flight times.
Theoretical Foundations for New Materials

Assumptions about Travel

Historically, travel for pleasure has been a privilege of the upper class; in recent decades travel has become more affordable and accessible for the bourgeoisie of developed countries, especially in the United States, Europe and China (Stewart, Leggat, 1998). Individuals preparing to travel are often emotionally capricious and view his or her upcoming journey as a grand adventure or a life-changing event.

“Travelers embark on their journeys with some or all of the following assumptions, believing the experience of a second culture to be beneficial to them because it will (1) broaden their perspective, (2) promote personality growth, (3) provide insights into their own culture through contrast with the other culture’s value systems and world views, (4) provide an escape from the tedium of everyday life, (5) provide experience of a second culture which is both educational and entertaining, and (6) promote culture contact leading to greater mutual understanding between peoples of the world, therefore promoting world peace. (Stewart, Leggat, 1998)”

These assumptions can cause a dichotomy of emotions ranging from euphoria to intense anxiety for an unprepared traveler while overseas. Geert Hofstede, creator of the ‘Hofstede Cultural Dimensions Theory’ and author of Culture’s Consequences, writes that “Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy; cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster” (2001, p. 12).

Travelers who are unprepared for these differences experience confusion, feelings of frustration and anger at the host culture, which can inhibit an international experience and, in extreme cases, put the traveler at real risk of emotional or physical harm.

GTD’s President, Kate Peer, reflects on culture shock and anxiety in an interview in 2013, “What travelers are really encountering when traveling to Israel and Palestine is a fear of the unknown. People are less afraid when they have seen something, experienced it and tasted it. Our media shows such a skewed view of so many places in the world; this was my way of making a difference – by battling ignorance, which I believe is the root of the problem” (Loan, 2013).

How Traveler Anxiety Affects GTD
While GTD has numerous systems in place to protect travelers and an unblemished company history of prioritizing the safety of clients, it is not possible to convince an anxious traveler that he or she will be safe while on tour. For example, GTD staff report that more than half of traveler cancelations from Holy Land tours are fear-driven. Often, loved ones of potential travelers convince him or her to cancel, arguing that the traveler is acting stupidly, selfishly, recklessly and “putting his or her life in danger”. For GTD staff, this level of traveler ignorance about the Holy Land can, at times, be staggering and seemingly insurmountable. Experienced group leaders combat these fears as best they can. However, not all of GTD’s group leaders have the time to address these concerns or to amass and distribute quality resources prior to departure.

**Adult Travelers and Technology**

The acceleration of globalization through social media, instantaneous communication and other rapid advancements in technology have served as tools for personal pre-trip planning and preparation. Travelers who take the time to prepare for his or her destination find infinite resources in the seemingly limitless world of apps, blogs and the internet at large. In human history there has never been so much accessible information available to so many. However, while the internet can be seen as a great equalizer, it can paradoxically create a widened gap between travelers who embrace the internet and social media to gather new information and those who are not comfortable with technology.

There is a discernible dichotomy of technological abilities among American adults. Some travelers do not even use email and prefer to mail or fax in documents. Many have embraced technology and contact GTD regularly for travel app recommendations or information on wifi availability at hotels in the Holy Land. This incredible spectrum of abilities and accessibility to instantaneous information can make tour preparation tricky for group leaders.
The ability to “self-select” one’s own pre-departure materials increases the range of the spectrum of traveler preparedness. While some individuals may challenge his or her self to find good quality materials online, others may be stunted by inaccurate or misleading information that is easily found on quixotic blogs or unrefined internet searches. Often, travelers do not know what to look for and unknowingly only seek out information which reaffirms previously held assumptions or beliefs forming a technology-driven confirmation bias. These travelers can be grossly unprepared emotionally, intellectually, physically or spiritually to travel.

Hofstede, Culture and Culture Shock

Geert Hofstede writes about culture and technology in his book, Culture’s Consequences, Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations,

The “global village” culture many hoped for in the advent of technology-based globalization has actually paid less attention to cultural differences. Ignoring these differences has resulted in misunderstandings or misinterpretations on a grander scale and at a greater speed than we can process the full implications of our mistakes (Hofstede, 2010).

To summarize Hofstede, adults are strongly rooted in their home cultures and usually tech-savvy. As a result, they tend to struggle with change and cultural differences the most. Many adult travelers do not realize he or she will be influenced by, interpreting everything through the lens of, and acting out his or her culture while in the host culture. Adult travelers also do not realize they are seen as informal “ambassadors” or “representatives” of that individual’s home culture. Many stereotypes of the quintessential “Ugly American” originate from individuals who behave caustically while traveling, unknowingly committing cultural faux pas while simultaneously feeling entitled to all of the comforts of home. There also is an increase in inflexible behaviors among the upper economic classes, as wealthy travelers resist changes to schedules or define “basic needs” on a more demanding, and sometimes unachievable, level than most (Hofstede, 2010).
The traveler’s culture, which was acquired in early childhood and then reinforced through formal and informal social education into adulthood, serves as the traveler’s framework for the foreign culture. Every food, gesture, intonation, traffic jam and aspect of body language will be compared and contrasted with the home culture subconsciously (Stewart, Leggat, 1998). Considering culture is built during a lifetime of cultural reinforcement behavior, it is unsurprising that adults struggle with cultural differences more than youth. Adults self-report stronger feelings of anxiety, frustration and anger while overseas and after they return to their home culture (Stewart, Leggat, 1998). Adults are more at risk of interpreting what he or she does not understand about the host culture as an inferior, flawed or unenlightened or “other” existence.

Variations in Cultures

Anthropologists and social psychologists have spent careers attempting to investigate, define and explain the innumerable differences between peoples. One of the most famous cultural models to date is of Richard Lewis’ creation which illustrates how cultural interaction varies from culture to culture (See Figures 1 & 2). Lewis introduces three categories of cultures that exist on a triangular continuum: Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Reactive. Each of these continuums is influenced by subcategories of study, such as how the culture is oriented to authority, what are the societal perceptions toward hierarchy and family structures, and what communication styles are most used, such as physical proximity and gesturing (Lewis, 2008).

GTD’s Travelers’ Cultures and the Holy Land

As discussed previously, GTD Holy Land groups are homogeneous in nature. To describe the adult groups in the context of Lewis’ framework, the travelers are almost exclusively from the United States’ “linear-active” culture. Unlike tours to many other destinations, Holy Land travelers will
experience what Lewis defines as Israel’s “multi-linear-active” culture and Palestine’s “multi-active” approach through the lens of American culture. Many travelers do not realize prior to departure that Arab and Israeli cultures are independent of each other, expecting to encounter a single “other” culture rather than a diverse population in a very small area. In addition to these fundamental differences in communication and hierarchical structures are the differences of religious beliefs between Muslims, Jews and Christians in Israel and Palestine.

Roughly 93 percent of GTD’s Holy Land travelers are traveling with Christian groups, usually led by pastors. Very few travelers have had any exposure to Islam or Judaism. Pastors indicate there is a great desire to address religious differences prior to departure; however, often this is not possible due to time constraints in the group leaders’ lives. General ignorance of the region becomes especially apparent whenever political tensions flare in the Holy Land, as anxious phone calls, worried emails and individual cancellations increase dramatically.

The Symptoms of Culture Shock

Kalervo Oberg first described culture shock in his 1960s article titled “Culture shock: adjustment to new cultural environments” as being comprised by six stages an individual will move through fluidly:

1. Strain – due to the effort to adapt to the unfamiliar
2. Loss – feeling deprived of friends, status, profession or possessions
3. Rejection – closing down to new experiences
4. Confusion of Role – often related to social status, values or self-identity
5. Disgust – only being aware of differences
6. Inability to Cope – feelings of helplessness or antagonism of foreign culture

As more research has been completed on the culture shock, other common symptoms have been added including:

1. Excessive concern over safety of self, drinking water, food, or lodgings,
2. Fear or anger at delays and minor frustrations or infractions,
Additional Factors that Can Influence the Severity of Culture Shock

Louise Stewart and Peter Leggat’s article “Culture Shock and Travelers” describes six main factors that can influence an experience with culture shock.

1. Degree of Control – Is the traveler unable to speak the language? Unable to understand the currency? Uncomfortable with the food or with their lodgings?
2. Intrapersonal Factors – Is the traveler prepared or inhibited by age, previous travel experience, or resourcefulness?
3. Organismic-Biological Factors – How is the physical condition of the traveler? Are there special dietary needs? Jet-Lag?
4. Interpersonal Factors – Does the traveler have the support of their family and friends? Do they know people in country?
5. Spatial-Temporal Factors – How long will they be away? How “foreign” is the culture?
6. Geopolitical Factors – Is the traveler at risk of being caught in a potential conflict? Are political tensions on the rise?

Based on these factors, GTD’s adult travelers are a high risk to experience culture shock in the Holy Land. For example, very few travelers have studied Hebrew or Arabic. Adult travelers often have more sensitive digestive systems or specific dietary needs due to medications. Jet-lag can be a serious concern for adults whose systems do not adapt quickly to changes. The “foreignness” of the Israeli and Palestinian cultures, the age and physical fitness levels of the travelers and the risk for potential conflict in the area all present challenges.

The Impact of an Effective Group Leader

In December of 2012, GTD had a unique opportunity to observe and contrast the leadership methods of two separate, experienced group leaders. These two groups departed to the Holy Land on nearly identical tours mere days apart from each other. Both sets of travelers were comprised of retired or semi-retired adults between the ages of 55-70. The travelers can also be described as upper class, well-educated, white, Midwestern urbanites. The most notable difference between these two groups was the group leader. Group “A” was led by a middle aged male pastor who did not provide any
supplemental material to his group. Group “B” was led by a young female pastor who provided seminars, speakers, reading lists, presentations and discussion groups prior to departure.

The following comments were taken from Group A evaluations in January, 2013.⁷

- Our guide brought his son along, although he was a great guide and his son was pleasant, I felt this was inappropriate and unprofessional.
- The food was boring and I doubt the kitchens were clean. How about at least one meal at a McDonald’s?
- My wife and I were upset our hotel in Bethlehem was a “dry hotel.”
- The men, especially, were very rude. Our first driver would not shake my hand without wrapping a piece of paper around his hand first. He only spoke to my husband, even when I was asking him the questions.
- I was frightened at the check points and felt very unsafe, especially in Bethlehem. You should not send groups to such a dangerous place.

Many of these comments carry a negative undertone. GTD’s evaluation scores were also notably low for Group A with an average score of 3.2 of the overall rating of the tour and a 3.5 for GTD staff and materials.

Compare these comments with those of Group B:

- The only rude person we encountered in the Holy Land was American. I was so embarrassed.
- I was impressed with the quality of our hotels, especially in Palestine. Considering the Palestinians have fewer resources, they were doing a good job.
- This tour deepened my understanding of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. It was truly priceless.
- Our group leader prepared us well to get us ready for our tour. While it is unsettling to see young soldiers with guns, I felt safe the entire time. I would like to go back again.

These positive and constructive comments were accompanied by a higher average score for the overall tour (a 4.7) and a glowing average score of 4.6 for GTD’s information and staff.

Ignorance and Ethnocentrism

GTD learned in discussions with the group leaders from Group A and Group B that Group A’s leader did not have the time to provide any supplemental information prior to departure, despite

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⁷ These comments are included anonymously. All of these comments were collected from tours that traveled to the Holy Land in 2012, a time of heightened political tensions between Israel and Palestine. Over the years, GTD has noticed an increase in comments like these during turbulent times in the Middle East.
his intentions to do so. He felt his travelers would have been “better travelers” if they had more information on the region, religions and had met to get to know each other prior to departure. Group B’s group met numerous times, had several guest speakers, met at a Middle Eastern restaurant, watched two films (one on Palestine and one on Israel) and were responsible for creating mini-presentations on various topics to present to each other. On Group Leader B’s final evaluation, she wrote that her goal had been to “challenge ignorance and ethnocentrism” among her travelers. This proved to be an effective tactic as a group leader.

Ethnocentrism, or “the judging of another culture based solely on one’s home culture’s values and standards” stands in the way of cultural sensitivity (Stewart and Leggat, p. 57). To summarize Stewart and Leggat’s conclusions: Challenging ethnocentrism using self-examination and a more critical consciousness can help to foster patience, open-mindedness and greater intercultural sensitivity. This self-awareness is especially important if the goal of an international interaction is to interact with and to learn from the people, rather than to travel is a traditional tourist.

The antithesis of ethnocentrism is a state of “ethnorelativism”. Ethnorelativism is defined by Stewart and Leggat as an acquired ability to see many values and behaviors as cultural rather than universal (Stewart and Leggat, p. 58). The “Bennett Scale” (See Figure 3) offers a visual interpretation of the development of intercultural sensitivity, or “ethnorelativism”. Bennett posits that travelers move fluidly along these six developmental stages to process cultural differences in order to achieve an attitude of empathy or, eventually, integration of the host culture.

Group leader “B” from the previously described group, did an exceptional job building intercultural awareness and sensitivity prior to departure by inviting guest speakers to group discussions, visiting restaurants, attending lectures and promoting activities that examined American culture while discussing what differences exist between American and Israeli or Palestinian cultures and small group discussions.
Why is Ethnorelativism Important?

Jack Valenti, the long-time president of the Motion Picture Association of America, once said “Washington and Hollywood have sprung from the same DNA.” Whether the topics are about elections, natural disasters, the inspirational American spirit or sports triumphs, American movies often focus on whatever is foremost in the American public’s mind. This tendency is symptomatic of the industrialization of Hollywood, as it battles to stay relevant to American interest to increase box office revenue.

Edutainment and the American Psyche

In 2009, the United States Bureau of Labor reported that an American adult over the age of 15 watches an average of 3.5 hours of television a day (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). This is 2,277 hours of television (or 53 days) in a year, which is greater than the number of hours a child is required to attend school in a year. Television, movies and media have become a new kind of non-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnocentric</th>
<th>Ethnorelative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cultural experience is the only one that is real and valid. There is little to no thought of “other.”</td>
<td>“I accept but may not agree with other cultures. Generally, I am curious and respectful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We” are superior and “they” are inferior. One feels threatened and is highly critical. What is strange may be labeled as stupid.</td>
<td>I “see” the world through different eyes and make intentional changes in my own behavior and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cultures are trivialized or romanticized. One tends to deny differences (e.g., “color blind”) and only seek similarities.</td>
<td>I easily move in and out of different cultural worldviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
formal education taking place in American homes among all ages, rooted in entertainment. This new trend of “edutainment” is influencing American opinions of everything from products to foreign policy.

GTD’s Holy Land tours, especially those that include visits to Palestine, are vulnerable to the whims of the American edutainment system. Research illustrates the phenomenon that Americans have become increasingly suspicious of Islam. In his article, “Roots of Misconception: Euro-American Perceptions of Islam Before and After September 11th,” Ibrahim Kalin reports a rise from twelve percent of Americans who believed “Islam encourages violence more than other religions” prior to 2001 to more than forty percent in 2003. Subsequent studies have shown this number continues to rise, with some scholars estimating that as many as three-quarters of Americans now believe Islam is a violent religion. Kalin goes on to describe how American commentators and news organizations continue to work to set Islam apart from its shared history with Christianity and Judaism (Kalin, 2004).

“Islam is still perceived as an alien phenomenon outside the religious and intellectual horizon of the Western world…. Furthermore, since the average Westerner is much more familiar with the Judeo-Christian tradition, he or she is in a better position to appreciate the diversity of that tradition and distinguish between the rule and the exception that proves it. In the case of Islam, we scarcely refer to a Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition whereby the historical unknowing of Islam may be undone and a more realistic picture of Islam may be constructed” (Kalin, 2004).

The result of this division is an increased fear of the “other.” Kalin surmises that by viewing Arab culture or Islam as something that is sub-human, it is easier to justify wars in the Middle East and the support of Israel as ‘an island in a sea of Islam’ (Kalin, 2004).

These misconceptions and anxieties regarding Islam affect GTD travelers drastically. While GTD has numerous safety procedures to protect travelers and an excellent track record of prioritizing the safety of clients, it is not possible to convince a worried traveler that what he or she sees on TV is not what will be experienced on tour. As a result of this fear, tour registrations suffer and cancellations increase. Traveler ignorance about the Holy Land can, at times, be staggering and
seemingly insurmountable, however, sometimes it is the worries of the children or parents of the traveler that are most difficult to address. Finding ways to promote open-mindedness and self-directed learning is critical to preparing adults to encounter new cultures.

**Adult Learning Theory**

**Working with Adults**

In *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, Malcolm Knowles writes there is an “art and a science to helping adults learn” (1980). To summarize Knowles, it is necessary for the instructor to acknowledge and embrace that adult pupils embody varied lifetimes, experiences and sets of knowledge before an instructor can successfully teach. In order to discover these histories, open and safe dialogues to share experiences must occur so that an instructor can discover what internal incentives and relevant information will be necessary for the group (Knowles, 1980).

Knowles’ conclusions are reminiscent of Paulo Friere’s revolutionary notion of *praxis* from *The Education of the Oppressed*. Praxis is defined as “an open dialog… coupled with critical thinking which result in a respectful relationship between teacher and student based on a horizontal power dynamic within the classroom structure” (1990, p. 17). Friere states that the purpose of critical thinking is to promote free thought, creativity and rational approaches to new ideas, thoughts or experiences. Friere compares his model to the classical model of “Banking Education” which elevates the teacher above the students as they “deposit” information in the students’ minds.

According to Friere, the best learning comes from a relationship based on equality between the teacher and the student. By establishing this learning environment, the teacher is empowering students to internalize new information, or, to experience it. Because international travel is essentially immersing oneself into new experiences, it is imperative to consider experiential learning as an optimal for acquiring new skills, knowledge or interests.
David Kolb’s well known Experiential Learning Cycle (See Figure 4) as become the theoretical foundation for educators throughout the world. Kolb states that learning is the acquisition of abstract concepts which can then be applied flexibly to new experiences. “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984).

Figure 4

Kolb suggests that every learner has a natural propensity for at least one of these four learning styles (Divergers, Assimilators, Convergers, and Accomodators) but has the ability to utilize each learning style in combination. Due to this diversity in learning styles, it is imperative that a trainer or teacher present knowledge in ways that play to each of these group’s strengths to promote an optimal learning environment. Kolb’s learning cycle was used as inspiration by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford who developed a model of Experiential Learning Theory who very simply explain that the adult learner needs to

1. Have a new experience
2. Review the experience
3. Conclude the experience
4. Plan the next steps based on the experience
They assign the following titles to these steps in their cycle: The Activist, The Reflector, The Theorist and The Pragmatist (Honey & Mumford, 2000).

**Applying Theory - Responding to Needs**

Based on traveler and group leader feedback, it was obvious that new objectives need to be established for GTD adult travelers. These new objectives are:

- To increase knowledge, cultural and religious awareness of Israel and Judaism
- To increase knowledge, cultural and religious awareness of Palestine and Islam
- To challenge and build a critical consciousness toward the traveler’s home culture
- To empower group leaders with resources to be successful in addressing traveler areas of interest or concern

Creating a resources lists for group leaders is a priority. A book focused “Recommended Readings” list, a “Films and Documentaries” list and a “Recommended Travel Apps” list were all created in light of this need. The book and films lists (see Appendices A & B) were generated from university and seminary syllabi, group leader and in-country partner recommendations, staff favorites and the UNICEF, Presbyterian Church of America, Lutheran World Relief, and Amnesty International resource lists. The apps list was generated using articles on travel apps and staff favorites (see Appendix C).

Based on group leader evaluations it has become apparent. A list of Biblical references and locations in the Holy Land has also been generated as a resource for group leaders interested in leading Bible studies on specific locations prior to departure or while on tour. This list is a compilation of seminary biblical study readings lists from Luther, Wartburg and Concordia Seminaries as well as Strong’s Exhaustive Bible Concordance (see Appendix D).

Each of these four lists will be distributed electronically to the group leaders by the Customer Service Specialists (CSS) once the first traveler registers for the tour. At this time, the CSS sends an
introductory email containing important deadlines and a list of suggested group activities, such as group discussions, speakers, Bible studies, films and field trips to restaurants and festivals. The CSS also encourages the group leader to take responsibility for the education of their travelers, including cultural and religious differences the group will encounter.

The potential outcomes of these recommendations will be better informed travelers who have more group synergy and are more prepared to travel when departure day comes. This will be measurable in self-reported scores for GTD, materials, “freeing prepared” and “the tour was a good value” categories on the final evaluation. To date, the new resources have been well-received by GTD’s first two test groups.

Once a tour is completed, the group leader and the GTD Representative will have a conversation about what, if any, information the group might like regarding the organizations they visited while overseas. This will be done in an effort to facilitate continued learning and understanding between American citizens and the Middle East. Direct communication will also help GTD’s touring congregations and special interest groups to gather resources that are directly requested by these groups, ensuring that what is needed is actually making it to those who need it. With the permission of the organizations and contacts, this contact information will be distributed to group leaders who express interest in staying in touch with Holy Land organizations or individuals.

**New Pre-Departure Overview**

**Improving Resources for Group Leaders**

The GTD Group Leader Handbook is being updated to reflect current information, all of the resources that have been newly developed and to include the adult learning theory written for this paper. However, the most important aspect of the new group leader book is that it will be a paperless textbook, developed on Apple’s Textbook Author software. This electronic book will be interactive with live-links, tables, YouTube videos and documentaries. It will be available to any group leader
who owns a tablet or e-reader. Offering an electronic book will appeal to a more tech-savvy generation of group leaders. Digitalizing the group leader book will also minimize printing costs, labor costs and make it significantly easier to keep the information up-to-date, as all of this can be done in house.

**New Information for Travelers**

In order to address more information that travelers needed earlier in the tour process, GTD developed two new processes. 1. All Holy Land brochures now include a notice that the tour will include much walking, daily, on uneven terrain. 2. An “FYI” sheet has been developed (See Appendix E) to address questions frequently asked of the CSS employees. The FYI will be sent out with the welcome letter upon traveler registration. The questions addressed on the FYI were gathered on a collective list by the CSS department over a three month period of time. The FYI also includes specific information regarding appropriate dress at the Holy sites, which was specifically mentioned by travelers multiple times in evaluations.

The purpose of the FYI and the acknowledgement of the high level of walking on the tour are intended to minimize phone calls to the CSS staff throughout the tour development process and especially in the months prior to departure. Information covered in the FYI is repeated in the final documents (21 days prior to departure) to expose travelers to the information twice.

Final documents have been updated with a new packing list and revised language in GTD’s trademarked PocketDocuments. The packing list has been updated to include technology and information on why and how to pack light for a tour. Final documents now include sections on “Communicating with Home” that are focused on technology and options for wifi-based communication. Language has also been updated to address new airline regulations, e-tickets and packing information.
Additional Communication with Travelers

In the past, no communication came directly from GTD to the traveler between the Welcome Letter (at the time of registration) and the Final Invoice (sent 90 days prior to departure). The following is a list of additional communication that has been added to the GTD work process. These pieces have already been generated and will be implemented according to the following timeline:

- 180 days: Send new FYI information with Welcome Letter
- 150 days: Email travelers a reminder regarding the 2nd payment
- 120 days: Send a letter regarding the situation in the Middle East\(^8\) (optional)
- 120 days: Send Recommended Reading List
- 90 days: Send a letter regarding situation in the Middle East\(^9\) (optional)
- 7 days: Send an electronic PocketDocument as a PDF for those carrying smart devices or for family members who want to be kept informed of where the group will be. Will be sent with the Recommended Apps list.
- Re-entry date: A Welcome Home email will be sent

Next Steps

Of the eleven suggestions recommended to GTD based on traveler feedback, nine of them have already been implemented. These new components include a reading/website list, a films list, an apps list, an updated packing list, a letter to group leaders encouraging activities and multiple gatherings, descriptions of appropriate clothing for travel to the Holy Land and information on walking, customs and languages. Work continues on the development of a “wish list” for our partnering organizations and also for the local resources list for Minneapolis-based groups.

GTD began development on the digitized group leader book in June of 2013. The first draft of the book will be presented at the company-wide meeting in November, 2013. At that time, a group leader will be selected to demo the book and provide feedback for further improvements. The digitized book will be available for all Holy Land group leaders in early 2014.

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\(^8\) This letter will only be sent if it is determined by the CSS and the GTD Sales Representative that the travelers are in need of more information on what is happening in the news. This is done on a case-by-case basis and is meant to quell fears during times of heightened tensions. The letters outline GTD’s history of working in the area, what safety measures are in place and where the travelers can go to get more information.

\(^9\) This letter is also generated on a case-by-case basis. Information in the letter will be specific to the sites visited by the group.
New processes have been set in place to enact the implementation of the new resources and communication methods effective immediately. The first group to depart in 2013 that will have been addressed using the new materials from start to finish will be in November of 2013. This group is considered the test case for the new materials and their evaluations will be carefully scrutinized for possible areas of improvement.

**Limitations & Conclusion**

GTD’s process for implementing changes is slow. Sub-committees are formed to research, design, edit and approve new materials before the new information is taken before monthly company meetings. Often additional changes will need to be made based on feedback from the company meeting, mandating an additional month of development before any chance can be implemented. Fortunately, many of the changes suggested in this paper have already begun; however, the first group to be affected by these changes from start to finish does not travel until November, 2013.

In conclusion, there is no great panacea for issues like culture shock and ethnocentrism, however improving materials for both group leaders and for travelers will be the beginning of a more informed and better equipped generation of travelers to the Holy Land. Future traveler feedback will dictate further development of resources and group leader materials. Ideally, GTD travelers will self-report fewer instances of culture shock and generally feel better prepared to encounter other cultures in a positive and respectful state of mind. Group leaders will be better informed on adult learning theory and culture shock, as well as given an interactive electronic leader book promoting activities, discussion topics, leadership suggestions and other pieces of information that will help them to be successful leaders. The final outcome for GTD will be greater customer satisfaction and knowing GTD helped to facilitate a more learned conversation about Israel, Palestine and the United States.
Bibliography


## Appendix A

### Recommended Readings for Travelers

#### The Holy Land

**GUIDE BOOKS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxford Archaeological Guide</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The Holy Land”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lonely Planet</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Israel &amp; the Palestinian Territories”</td>
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**NON-FICTION**

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<td>2008</td>
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<td>Chittister, Joan</td>
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### Non-Fiction - Continued

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<td>Tolan, Sandy</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>Younan, Munib</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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### Additional Websites

- Amnesty International: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

Help us stay current!
If you have additional books or resources you would like to suggest to Group Travel Directors, please let us know!
Recommended Films for Holy Land Travelers

FILMS

Many of these are available through Vimeo, Netflix, Amazon Prime and/or YouTube.

5 Broken Cameras, 2011

This award winning documentary focuses on a Palestinian farmer's chronicle of his nonviolent resistance to the actions of the Israeli army.

Watch the trailer here: http://trailers.apple.com/trailers/independent/5brokencameras/

Promises, 2001

Promises presents a powerful portrait of seven Palestinian and Israeli children who live in and around Jerusalem. As filmmaker B.Z. Goldberg, who was raised in Israel, notes, They live no more than 20 minutes from each other, but they are each growing up in very separate worlds. The children include Mahmoud, Shlomo, Sanabel, Faraj, Moishe, and twins Yarko and Daniel.

Watch it online here: http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/promises/

Occupation 101, 2007

A thought-provoking and powerful documentary film on the current and historical root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and U.S. political involvement.

Watch it online here: http://vimeo.com/14327996

"Israel and Palestine: A Very Short Introduction"

Youtube video by Jewish Voice for Peace (6 minutes)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y58njT2oXfE
Jerusalem: The East Side Story, 2008

The documentary takes you on a journey exposing Israel’s policy to gain supremacy and hegemony over the city and its inhabitants. The film includes interviews with Palestinian and Israeli leaders, human rights activists and political analysts.

This film is available in its entirety in six 10 minutes parts on YouTube.

Watch the trailer here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSmZ6yTtLF4

The Birth of Israel, 2008

Documentary examining the events leading up to the Israeli war of Independence in 1949, its continuing impact on Arab/Israeli relations and the implications for the Middle East peace process.

Jeremy Bowen, the BBC’s Middle East editor examines the events leading up to the conflict, the war itself and the lasting legacy for the Middle East.

Watch it online here: http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/birth-of-israel/

Christians in the Holy Land, 2012

The exodus from the Holy Land of Palestinian Christians could eventually leave holy cities like Jerusalem and Bethlehem without a local Christian population. Bob Simon reports.

Watch it online here: http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7406228n

The Iron Wall, 2006

The Iron Wall documentary exposes the phenomenon of settlements and follows the timeline, size, population, and its impact on the peace process.

Watch it online here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBamQ2aONA

Help us stay current!
If you have additional books or resources you would like to suggest to Group Travel Directors, please let us know.
15 Favorite Apps for Travel

1. Skype
Video chat with your family over wifi for free from Skype account to Skype account or pay for a call from Skype account to a land line or cell phone.

2. FaceTime
Video chat for free from Facetime account to Facetime account over wifi.

3. Cards
Use your photos to create a custom-made card to send to your family and friends.

4. WordPress
An intuitive and simple way to blog while abroad.

5. Viber
Text and make phone calls for free over wifi. Call anyone else with viber for free, anywhere in the world.
6. WhatsApp
Text and make phone calls for free over wifi. Call anyone else with WhatsApp for free, anywhere in the world.

7. FlightAware
Plug in your airline and flight number and let FlightAware do the rest. Accept push notifications for updates on flight delays, gate changes or cancellations.

8. Oanda Currency Converter
Easily convert currencies with the push of a button.

9. Google Translate
Google Translate allows you to translate text between 57 languages, receive translation by speaking into the phone for 15 languages, and display translations so that they are easier to read.

10. Word Lens
Translate signs and menus by holding your phone or tablet’s camera up to the text and viewing the image on your screen.
11. World Customs
Wonder which way to wrap that kimono?
This app dispenses cultural tidbits and no-nos.

12. Cultures
To compare and contrast your home culture with your host culture, use Cultures.

13. The Weather Channel
Weather Channel gets the nod for customization and the ability
to check out conditions in multiple locations at a glance.

14. iPhoto
A must-have for serious photographers on-the-go.
iPhoto is a robust editing program with email and Facebook built in.

15. Instagram
Share your photos easily and instantly on social media using Instagram.
Appendix D

**HOLY LAND BIBLICAL SCRIPTURE GUIDE**

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I Chronicles 18:5  
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Amos 1:4-8  
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**CAESAREA**

**CAESAREA PHILIPPI**
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Judges 9:1-21
St. John 4:4-40

MOUNT HERMON
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Song of Solomon 4:8
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IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR YOUR TOUR TO PALESTINE / ISRAEL

What documents will I need?
Be certain you have your passport, showing at least six months of validity beyond the return date of your tour. You will need to present your passport at all airports and for entrance into the country; without it you will be denied boarding. As a precaution, make a copy of the photo page and keep it separate from your passport.

Where is my airline ticket?
Most airlines only issue electronic tickets. Your final documents will contain a final air itinerary which will include your airline confirmation and ticket number. Your group leader will also have a copy of all confirmation and ticket numbers that were issued by Group Travel Directors (GTD) for group check-in.

How is the seating determined on my flight?
Seating for groups is determined by the airline about one month prior to departure, even though GTD submits requests well in advance of this date. Airlines do their best to honor requests made by GTD on your behalf. Reconfirm your preferences with the ticket counter agent at check-in.

How can I make the long flight easier?
Long flights can be made more enjoyable by taking a few minutes every hour to increase circulation, break the boredom, and rejuvenate tired muscles. Here are a few tips:
• Be well rested prior your trip.
• Stretch before boarding.
• Wear comfortable clothing in layers.
• Do not sit with your legs crossed, or in one position, for a long period of time.
• Eat light meals and avoid excessive amounts of alcohol.
• When the seat belt sign is off, get up, stretch and walk around.

What clothing should I bring?
Dress for comfort and convenience. Bring walking shoes, an umbrella, and something for cooler temperatures, especially in the evening. Remember that weather is unpredictable. Plan to layer clothing. Pack with a mind to “mix and match” outfits to get the most mileage out of the least amount of clothes. Jeans are acceptable for the daytime; slacks are acceptable for evening wear for men and women.

Backless or sleeveless blouses and shorts are inappropriate at religious sites and in some communities. Women’s heads should be covered in mosques; men should wear hats in synagogues.

How much luggage may I bring?
Your tour includes gratuities for the handling of one piece of baggage. This piece cannot exceed 50 pounds or 62 linear inches (length + width + height). Additional baggage or overweight/oversized baggage will be subject to additional fees by the airline at check-in. You are allowed one carry-on piece, in addition to a personal item, such as a purse, day pack or
computer bag. Carry-on baggage typically cannot exceed 45 inches in linear measurement with a maximum weight between 20-40 pounds, depending on the airline. Airlines reserve the right to check carry-on pieces that do not fit under the traveler’s seat. Include your name and address inside your suitcase.

Some suggestions for packing your suitcase:
- Pack heavy items in the bottom of your bag or suitcase (shoes, shaving kit).
- Pack jackets, skirts, and dresses inside out so that wrinkles will be inverted and not show.
- Roll small items in the shoulders of jackets and blouses, and in shoes.
- Pack last what you want to wear first at your destination.

Laundry facilities are limited; bring liquid laundry detergent to wash clothes in the sink. Please be aware that some hotels do not provide washcloths for guests; also, many public restrooms may not have adequate supplies of toilet paper. Consider bringing tissues as “back up”.

Note: while you are in Bethlehem, you will be asked to put used toilet paper into a waste receptacle, rather than into the toilet. This is due to inadequate plumbing facilities in the Occupied Territories.

Pack toiletries and at least one change of clothing in your carry-on luggage in the event your checked luggage is delayed. Keep valuable items as well as medications in your carry-on.

How can I secure my belongings?
Protect your passport, credit cards and money by keeping them concealed (e.g. around your neck, under your shirt, or in a money belt). Purses should have secure fasteners, and avoid slinging your purse carelessly on your shoulder. Do not carry wallets in your back pocket, as this is an easy target for pickpockets. Avoid bringing valuable jewelry on the tour. Consider using a safe deposit box in hotels.

What is the time difference?
The Palestine/Israel is eight hours ahead of Central Standard Time (seven during Central Daylight Time).

What about electricity?
The electric current in the U.S. is 110 volts at 60 cycles. The Israel/Palestine is 220 volts at 50 cycles. Thus U.S. electrical devices may need a converter and an adapter to operate at 220 volts. Dual voltage devices only require an adapter.

Is English widely spoken?
Most hotel staff and shopkeepers will know some English as they serve foreign visitors regularly. Your tour escort and local guides will speak English. Hebrew is the official language of Israel; Palestinians speak Arabic. In any foreign country, a smile and an attempt to speak even just a few words of the native language, such as “Please” or “Thank you” gets a warm reception.
**How can I communicate with home?**
There are many options for communicating with home should you decide it is necessary. Wifi access varies depending on the hotel and the resources in the area. Some hotels offer wifi access for free or for a small fee. Skype, Facetime or WhatsApp are options for communicating from your personal mobile device, such as a tablet or smartphone.

If your hotel does not offer wifi, it may provide computer access for guest use in the lobby or business center. Internet cafes are available in some cities. Some cell phone providers offer reasonable international calling, texting and data plans; check with your provider to discuss your options. International calling cards work well for those who wish to travel “low-tech.”

**What are the average temperatures and precipitation?** (Sample degrees in Fahrenheit)

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**What’s for dinner?**
Buffets offer a great variety of fresh and unique regional foods, falafels, mansaf, musakhan, and shish kababs are common. Ask your guide for recommendations if you would like to try the local cuisine.

**How can I prepare for cultural differences in the Holy Land?**
Israel and Palestine are two beautifully distinct cultures. GTD has recommended readings lists, film lists and web resources for those who are interested in going deeper in your international experiences. Search app stores for great travel, language and cultural “dos and don’ts” apps. Online resources, such as “iTunes U” offer free online classes on nearly any topic you may be interested in researching.

**How much walking is involved?**
Tours typically involve a lot of walking and uneven terrain. If you have difficulty walking there may be times during the tour when you will elect to wait on the bus and rest.

**Can I drink the water?**
Drink bottled water if you have a sensitive system; however, most travelers have no problem with tap water in Israel. In Palestine, we recommend you drink bottled water unless otherwise advised.
Where can I find out about the trouble spots in the world?
The U.S. Dept. of State’s travel advisory website is http://travel.state.gov/travel/or call 202-647-5225. Currently, there IS a travel warning to Israel/Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza. GTD and our in-country partners monitor potential areas of unrest closely; if a specific site is deemed unsafe, we will reroute the tour program to avoid the affected area.

What do I do in the event of an emergency?
Tell your group leader or guide about the problem immediately. Your leader and your guide are advocates and have instructions of how to handle various situations.

How can I get my medication in a foreign country?
Bring enough of your prescription medications so that you will not run out while you are away from home. Foreign countries do not always have the same brand names or dosages for prescriptive drugs, and your doctor’s prescription may not be honored. If you wear prescription glasses, bring a second pair or sunglasses to use as a backup in case yours are lost or broken. Keep all prescription drugs in the original containers to avoid trouble at Customs. *If you do purchase medication while on tour, be aware that some foreign over-the-counter and prescription drugs may be illegal in the US.* Some useful over-the-counter drugs to bring are: aspirin, Tums, Pepto-Bismol, Maalox, vitamins, etc.

Where can I find out about immunizations or ask other health questions?
The Center for Disease Control’s website (www.cdc.gov) offers complete and up-to-date information regarding travel recommendations. At this time Israel/Palestine does not require any vaccinations.

What is my customs allowance?
When returning to the U.S. you will pass through Customs in the first U.S. city you enter. You are allowed to bring $800 worth of duty free goods per person into the U.S.; the next $1,000 is taxable at 10%. Items marked MADE IN ISRAEL are often exempt from this duty allowance. If you have been out of the U.S. within 30 days prior to your trip, you are not eligible for the $800 in duty free purchases.

What is Value Added Tax (VAT)?
Tourists who purchase goods with foreign currency exceeding $100 at shops listed by the Ministry of Tourism are entitled to a discount of at least 5 percent off the purchase price at the shop and a VAT refund at the port of departure. Ask the merchant if your purchase qualifies for a VAT refund; All paperwork must be completed at the shop. Check with your tour guide for guidance to claim your VAT refund.

How much money should I bring?
Bring enough money to cover incidental expenses, such as meals and beverages not included, optional excursions, gifts, drinks, etc. Meals are similar in price to those in the United States.

What about tipping for non-group services?
Tips for group services have been pre-collected at time of final invoicing (guides, driver, porters, hotel staff and group meals). For other gratuities, it is customary to add 10-15% to the bill.
What is the currency, and should I exchange money before I go?
1USD = approximately 3.65 New Shekels in Israel/Palestine (this currency is used in both regions). In most cases, U.S. currency is also accepted, thus exchanging money prior to departure is not necessary. Visa and Mastercard are accepted in many stores and hotels; however, there will be occasions when you will need cash.

Purchases made with credit cards usually offer the best rates of exchange—check with your credit card company about their service fees and alert them you will be using the card outside of the U.S. Travelers’ Cheques are no longer recommended. For cash, you may find a combination of resources is helpful, including: ATMs, banks, exchange bureaus, and hotels. Consult your tour guide regarding availability and hours of operation.

What is the procedure for checking in for the return flight home?
Travelers departing from Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv are often questioned by security guards prior to checking in. When you are questioned, answer truthfully and concisely.

Oftentimes, when the guards hear that you have been staying in Bethlehem, they will question you further and ask why you were there. Tell them you visited a Lutheran church there, and that your tour was a Christian pilgrimage. Once the questioning is over, they will take all of your bags (including your carry-on pieces) and inspect them.

Be patient with the people doing the bag searches, this is normal procedure in Tel Aviv.

What are departure taxes?
All U.S. and Israeli departure taxes have been prepaid for this tour.

What is NOT included in the price of my tour?
Items of a personal nature, beverages other than coffee or tea at breakfast, postage, laundry services, meals other than indicated; optional excursions.