It is easy to become caught up in the potential of a given volunteer experience and overlook the practical parameters each opportunity presents. Wherever you choose to volunteer and whatever you choose to pursue during these endeavors, a properly-selected organization can mean the difference between a fulfilling experience and a disappointing disaster.

When traveling independent of the School of Dentistry, it is important to consider all of the variables that would otherwise be accounted for in a school-approved program:

1. What is the program's relationship with local law enforcement?
2. What are others' thoughts and reviews regarding any aspects of the trip?
3. If the organization states that care will be provided, who will the provider? Who will supervise? Are these treatment modalities exceeding your current scope of practice?
4. What accommodations are provided?
5. Is this a new destination for the organization?
6. Is the treatment offered legal?
7. Do the group leaders carry the necessary emergency equipment for a worst-case scenario?

There are steps you can take to make sure you are participating in an adventure that meets standards and puts safety of its volunteers before anything else:

2. Contact the head of the organization for questions – if any questions remain unanswered, be wary and consider