

TRAVEL PREPARATION



SAFETY GUIDELINES & TRAVEL TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY:

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(DevXchange volunteer and photographer for the March, 2007 African tour)

1. Be Informed

- One of the biggest dangers of traveling is ignorance and arrogance. One must always remember to take precautions.
- Do your research and don't believe everything the media portrays. Rather read through reputable travel guides and publications, such as the Lonely Planet guide.
- Look through travel websites for blogs and forums of others who may have travelled to the same destinations that you plan to visit.

2. Be Prepared

- **Keep current.** Check the DevXchange website for updates on projects. Check websites USAID, Alertnet and others for country updates. We don't encourage a volunteer to go to a country we feel is unsafe.
- **Stay in touch** - Inform friends or family of how they can reach you whilst you are away. If you have the funds and are working in an urban centre your cell phone may work if it is activated with international roaming - contact your cellular provider about this before you leave!

Ethiopia Contact Info:

P.O. Box 853, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia,
Tel - 011-251-58-220-4247

3. Keep Documents Safe

- **Keep copies** - Prepare additional photocopies of your important travel documents to carry with you. Keep these in a separate bag from the originals. As well leave a copy with friends or family.
- **Travel light** – leave non-vital cards and documents at home (e.g. OHIP, S.I.N., Birth Certificate, extra credit cards etc.) It is likely the only documents you will need are passport, International Health booklet, one credit card (preferably VISA), and Driver License (if you plan on driving a car). It's helpful sometimes to have an extra pair of passport size photos – if needed for a permit, or visa or other document.
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4. Protect luggage

- Have lockable luggage and keep important documents and your cash in a safe place upon arrival.
- Don't bring fancy luggage - this will only attract thieves.
- If your luggage is black (most common colour) you might consider putting a coloured tape or ribbon on it to help identify it at the airport or on public transport. Make sure it is durable and preferably water-proof if you are planning to work or travel in rural areas.

5. Protect Valuables and Money

- Leave valuables at home – including expensive watch, jewelry, designer clothes.
- Consider shopping at Value Village and leaving your clothes behind before returning home.
- It's often easier to travel with just VISA and U.S. cash. Cashing travelers cheques can be problematic in some countries and require long bank processes.
- Changing currency is sometimes easiest at the airports. Banks can be slow. In many African countries there are no debit machines. There is sometimes a surcharge in VISA/MC in some countries so cash is best. Very few places take VISA.
- Never keep all your cash in one place and be sure you have plenty of smaller denominations as well as \$20 and 50\$. At the start of your trip a money belt works well, as this is when you will have the most cash.
- Pick up a few extra cloth change purses at the dollar store for local currencies (one for each country you plan to visit). Make your purchases from these and keep your U.S. dollars in a secure place.

Note:

Ethiopian banks can be fussy about changing U.S. bills. Make sure they are not marked, torn or too old. ... Oh... and they also don't accept brand new ones.

6. Travel Wisely

- Leave a copy of your flight schedule and itinerary with a friend or family member at home.
- Remember to confirm you onward flights at least 72 hours before your next departure.
- Know the address where you will be staying in each country as the information is often required on landing cards.
- Always have a contact number in every country you visit.
- Have a list of Canadian embassy numbers and addresses for each country you visit.
- Third world airports can be a challenge. Be assertive. You can sometimes be put in wrong lines etc. Don't hesitate to ask for help.
- Be very attentive about your luggage.
- If you can board the plane as soon as possible, you will be more likely to find overhead space for your luggage. Try to sit near the front as there is generally more room and you get off sooner, and will make customs lineups a little easier. Many African flights have open seating. (i.e. not assigned).
- Stick together - Traveling alone isn't advisable; it's best to stay in a group of people that you trust. Tell others your destination, route and ETA. Always keep your luggage padlocked and never let it out of your sight in unsecured places.
- Street savvy - Be wary of con artists! Do not deal with black-market currency traders in particular; if they're not out to con you themselves, they're often involved with a scam with the local authorities and then you'll be fined for illegal dealings. Always look out for normal pickpocket tricks such as being bumped into, distracted or crowded.
- Health and Vaccinations - Ensure you have the correct vaccinations before you depart. Visit a Travel Clinic to find out what shots you need early in your planning. Some vaccinations require boosters over a 6 month period, so give yourself plenty of time to get prepared.

7. Pack Appropriately

- Keep your luggage simple. The lighter you travel the easier it is.

Items which can be useful:

- Facecloth (not available in Africa)
- Cereal bars, dried fruit, nuts, etc, gum, fruit jellies etc. Some of these small food items can come in handy. Bran bars are especially helpful in Ethiopia where the diet of white bread and injera can be rather constipating.
- Disposable gloves are not essential but may come in handy. (One or two pair). You never know when you might need them. (Hopefully you will not).
- TP – always carry with you. Packages of handi wipes, baby wipes, small bottles of hand cleaner (to use instead of soap and water if not available). Small hand soaps...hotels do not always provide them.
- ORS – packets of “oral rehydration salts”, or packets of Gatorade etc. in case of diarrhea.
- Variety of medications for diarrhea, infections, bug bites etc
- Reading material – both info on the country you are going to (i.e. Lonely Planet guide), novel you might enjoy. Print material is not readily available in Africa (no problem in Addis)
- Small flashlight comes in very handy...there are power outages and in a strange room at night you may not easily find the light switch. LED lights are great...very light, and no batteries.
- Small towel (Camping towel can be useful. You cannot wrap yourself in it, but it is very absorbent, packs easily, and is your own...clean!
- Skirt – in rural areas, skirts are worn more than pants. A wrap can be tied over your pants, which works well. The wrap can also be useful to put over a pillow which does not look so clean, or on a bed with questionable sheets. (Some outdoor stores sell silk sleeping bag liners, which can be used, in a regular bed if necessary).
- Insect repellents – may have to be used at night, and during the day if you are traveling in cabs, public busses etc. Put some around your waist area, as the fleas (especially in Ethiopia) like to get up inside your clothes. Better to be safe than sorry!
- Sunscreen, lip balm, hat, sunglasses. Long sleeved light shirt, light long pants.
- Sandals are useful, but proper hiking running shoes may be needed in the countryside. Closed shoes are better in areas where there are chiggers. If you get a chigger, the best way to remove it is smothering it with a layer of nail polish. So a small bottle of nail polish might come in handy – for guys and girls.
- Clothing that can be layered, easily washed and dried. There are no electric clothes dryers. Do not wear jewelry or a fancy watch. You do not want to draw attention to yourself.

8. Photograph Responsibly

- Be cautious with photography. Ask before taking pictures.
- Do not take pictures of airports, police, government buildings, bridges, etc when in an African country.
- Be sensitive about photographing naked children. In areas where this is the norm, be sure to crop the photo before showing it publicly, so it protects the integrity and dignity of the child (and the photographer).
- Accent the positive! Try to capture the strengths and resilience of poorer communities, not just scenes of poverty.
- Digital cameras are most versatile and handy – even better if they have video capacity to capture sound and action.
- Take extra memory cards for your camera or a memory stick to download your photos on when you have access to a computer.



Accent the positive!

9. Travel Insurance

- **Medical Expenses:** We recommend that you are covered for a minimum of \$100,000 and please ensure that you are covered for repatriation (being flown home if there is the need).
- **Cancellation and curtailment:** How much you need to be covered for cancellation and curtailment is not mandatory but recommended. The coverage will depend on the cost of your ticket and any other expenses you may have to pay out to get yourself to the project.
- **Adventurous activities/extreme sports:** We recommend that you are covered for this if you are planning on doing any 'out-of-the-ordinary' activities such as white water rafting, bungee jumping, surfing, river canoeing, etc.
- **Insurance cover for travel documents:** Cash limit and personal liability are not mandatory for African Impact volunteers but are recommended. It is up to you to decide on your cover for these areas, and to consult your insurance broker.
- **Insurance cover for baggage and personal belongings:** This is up to you– this covers your luggage and its contents. Add up the value of your luggage and belongings and decide how much the contents are worth. Some travelers opt rather to insure individual items that are of the highest value, e.g. digital camera