

Chapter 6

COUNTRY FOR MISSION

Before going to a specific country for a visit or work, there are many things to consider in preparation for your trip. Hand symbols, which are okay in our culture, may be obscene in other cultures. Body language, which has no meaning in our culture, may have significant meaning in other cultures. Money has a different value than ours and many factors should be considered before going to another country to work. This section will cover a few basics, but by no means is it a catchall of what to study and know about before you go. Each country you visit will have its own unique set of cultural and physical differences. One of the first places to go for information is to access the Internet. A good start would be to Google the country and look at websites that are referenced. Book stores such as Barnes and Noble will have travel books about almost every country. The state department at www.travel.state.gov/ will give several pages of vital information including the US Embassy and Ambassadors of that country. Travel agencies are also loaded with information. These days information is at your fingertips.

Secondly, talk to a person who has already been to the country. It is wise to work with missionaries who have lived in a country for a number of years. Sit down and spend several hours getting oriented to the “Do’s and Don’ts” of a country before getting started. Communication before you pack is important, especially if your source can give you tips on a wide range of conditions to expect. Northern and Southern Hemispheres have opposite seasons, so the weather may be vastly different in the country where you intend to go, compared to the temperature and weather you have at home. Gather all the information possible before you launch out on the trip, so you will be well prepared. **KNOW BEFORE YOU GO!**

Culture

Read all you can about the customs and beliefs of the people you intend to visit. Each country, with its social strata and geographical setting will be different. Trace the history of that culture through their past to give yourself a better understanding of that population or people group.

Religion

Know something about the religion of the country and of the people you plan to visit. Their religious beliefs may dictate to a great degree how they will react to you. Never underestimate the value of a person's religion and how it can influence their conduct. There are radical religious sects who teach their children from a young age that people from other cultures are infidels. Killing an infidel is not a sin. There are religious people groups who will be nice to you, but have no reservation about doing you harm. Warning! Be very careful to know the religious orientation of the people you go to serve. Do **not** be naive.

Language

Some knowledge of a native dialect is important. A small chapter is devoted to communication. Know at least what language is spoken and learn a few phrases, if possible, such as, **yes, no, please, thank you** and **you are welcome**. Flash cards with basic phrases can be a great help.

Vocation

The vocation of the people you visit could be almost anything to nothing depending upon which country you choose. Know if they are hunters, shepherds, fisherman, "jungle tribe," herdsman or live in city suburbs. It may help to know about their work environment so you can understand their life style and everyday routine. There may be infectious diseases endemic to that group of people or nutritional deficiencies that affect clotting factors you should know about.

Education

Much will depend upon the quality of life and the emphasis people place on their children. This may be a factor to consider in how you communicate with them. The children may be able to read, but the parents may have little or no formal education. In this case, the children would have to read printed material to the parents. Education as we know it, may be totally absent from the society you work with.

Wildlife

Insects, fish, and animals of the region where you are going should be important considerations. It would be good to know if piranhas infest a pool of water where you intend to swim. Granted it is not a consideration for most countries, but it depends upon where in the world you are going. Insect repellent for mosquitoes is essential, as is medicine for malaria, if in a tropical climate. A friend of mine laid in a coma for weeks before dying because she elected not to take malaria medicine as a precaution on a two-week mission trip. She contracted malaria and it went to her brain. It pays to take precautions against disease if there is even a remote chance of being exposed. Animals and insects can be carriers of serious diseases endemic to the region where you work.

Endemic Diseases

This needs to be high on your checklist. The **Center for Disease Control** www.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx in Atlanta, Georgia prints a "**Blue Book**" every two weeks about the diseases to be concerned with in each country of the world and precautions to take. There are many inoculations available through your local health department at reasonable prices before you go. Keep your International Vaccination Document current and in your passport.

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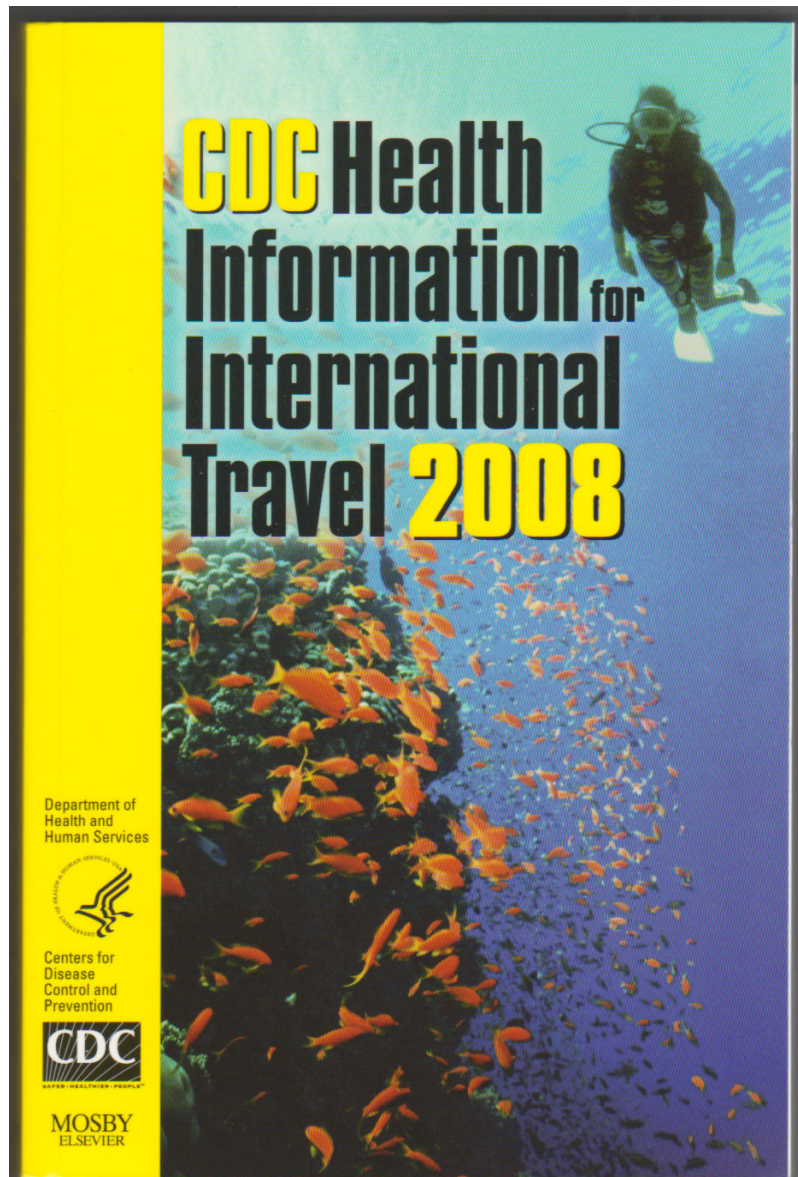
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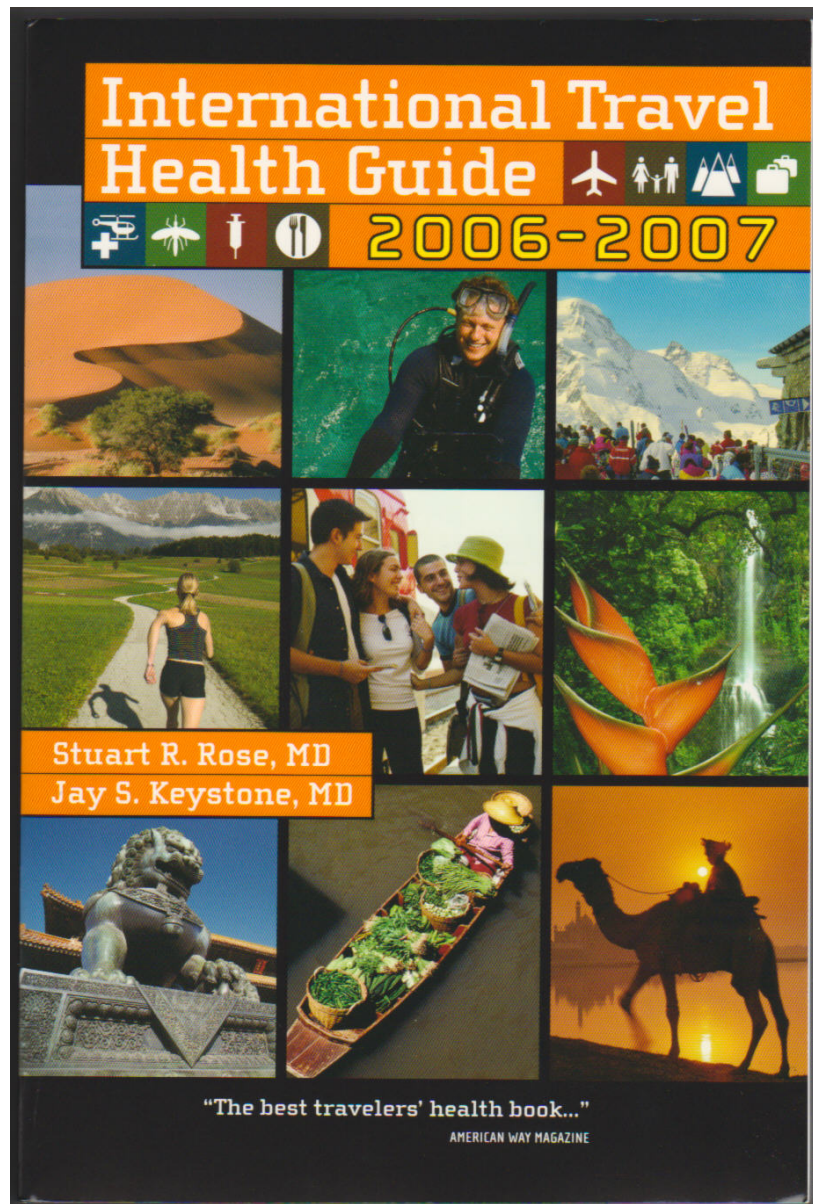
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Health and Sanitation

These conditions are many times hard to determine until you are in the host country. Some third world countries use raw sewage to irrigate their rice and corn fields. Disease can cycle over and over again in this unsanitary environment, so be careful what you eat. Most countries teach healthcare and prevention, but the people do not always practice it. You may not be able to eat and drink what the local people do.

Food and Water

These should be the highest on your priority list of things to know before you go. I normally carry a canteen of water and eat only cooked foods. Stay away from unsafe water, pastries, salads, and anything someone else has touched. You may like foods that you can peel and eat yourself. I have been very sick several times, so I'm naturally cautious. Take snacks to eat when safe local food is not available. Fresh bread and peanut butter can carry you for days. Be careful of using tap water to brush your teeth or rinsing with a mouthful of water while showering. Individuals can get sick this way also. Bottled water is usually available in every country of the world.

Health Facilities

Medical clinics vary from country to country so be aware of where the good ones are in case of an emergency. You may have to learn about them after you arrive in the country. There can be the best and the worst hospitals in the same country, so know where the best are located. We advise teams to have health insurance for travel when possible.

Physician and Dental Training

Educational standards and standards of care can vary substantially from country to country. You may want to know how well trained the professionals are, especially if you will be working with them. I have seen countries that give a dental license based on apprenticeship. Also, new governments can "grandfather" people in without any formal training. You should have some idea of their level of training and skills.

Dental Health of the Population

Knowing the general dental conditions will help orient you to the needs of the people you will treat. The dentist/population ratio will also be an indication of the population's access to care. The WHO used to have statistics on those ratios for each country. For example, in Laos there were fourteen dentists for the entire country of about six million people.

Equipment Availability

This certainly may be a concern for you. Some countries are so poor that the physicians of large state hospitals must share the same stethoscope. Dental equipment may be state-of-the-art or completely unavailable in the country of

your service. If you become easily frustrated with inconveniences in equipment, for certain ask about what equipment they have, how old it is, and does it work? Learn to do the best you can with what is available, even limited services will be appreciated. **KNOW BEFORE YOU GO!**

Weather

Climate will determine to a great degree how you pack your suitcase. Try to find out the temperature and weather conditions directly before you select clothes and pack. (Don't assume laundry facilities.) Your home Internet and local TV weather channels are good sources if they have a world map and world temperature readings.

Altitude

Elevation can be a significant consideration with persons having emphysema, blood pressure, or heart problems. Those have been real health factors for some team members on past trips. Altitude sickness upon exertion can quickly set you down. Sometimes it takes several days for RBC's and the body to catch up with the elevation if you are not used to it. People with serious health problems should check with their physician before going on a mountain mission.

Humidity

Moisture can adversely affect electronic equipment, clothing and comfort on a trip into the jungle. Some of your supplies or equipment may need to be packed in plastic with moisture absorbing packets to protect them. I have seen it so humid that clothes would not dry for several days. You will learn to be quite adaptable in these 100% humidity environments. Read any information available, about how to pack and what to expect if traveling in some of these humid environments and tropical jungles. People who live there would be your best source of information.

Natural Resources

Fishing, hunting, diving or exploring may be interests you will want to pursue while working in another country. By all means take some time to see the natural beauty of the country. Smell the roses along the way to make your trip relaxing as well as rewarding. No one expects you to be all work and no play.

Industries

Local products may or may not be a factor to consider for your particular trip. Wood carving, glass, pottery, clothing and other hand-made items could be important to you. Certainly there are gems, furs and rugs to be seen in many countries you visit. Normally each U.S. citizen has a \$400.00 limit on overseas purchases before taxes are charged.

Government

Officials can be a friend or foe depending on how they view your team's activities within their country. Generally, you will be welcomed as a professional wherever you go. People of the world have a great respect for American professionals. But, that is not to say in civil war or guerrilla warfare, they would have any regard for your life. In Cambodia, professionals and the educated were the targets of the killing. Be aware of the politics and political climate of a country before you go.

Government Policy on Health Care

Legalities may directly affect you and your ability to practice dentistry in a country. Some health ministries have very strict guidelines and others no guidelines at all. Once, I had to work three months on paperwork in triplicate and give detailed lists of the supplies (with expiration dates) and the equipment I was taking to a country, before a permit to practice was granted. And there are some countries that absolutely will not grant a license to practice. Write, FAX or talk to health professionals in the country about government policy. Then if necessary, communicate with the Ministry of Health and see what is required of you in order to work in their country legally.

Currency

Money constantly changes value in all countries. Exchange rates are figured against "hard" currency such as the dollar, pound, or mark. You can call a major bank or look in the financial section of a major newspaper for the comparable value of currencies or Google it. Depending on how long your stay may be, exchange enough dollars for meals, tips, and transportation. I have been in several countries where you could not exchange money back, once you gave them your dollars. They wanted the U.S. dollars and not their own money! Take a calculator so you can figure the value of goods you purchase and the amount of change. Visa, MasterCard, and American Express can be used at major hotels in most countries. I also have been in countries that would only accept cash as payment, because exchange rates were so volatile (inflation). Local merchants may not be familiar with traveler's checks, so check financial arrangements before going to another country. Once we had to carry \$13,000 in cash into a country to pay expenses for a medical team working there for two weeks.

Insurance

Be sure of your coverage in other countries. Check with your insurance company to see if you are covered overseas by your U.S. policies. Normally auto insurance is only good a few miles over the border in Mexico. If renting an automobile, be sure to get local insurance with the contract. Health insurance coverage varies greatly in its provisions for foreign travel. Many types of travel insurance are available for you. Several plans are available for the specific days that you are overseas. It is very reasonable. (Approximately \$2.50 per day)

Security

Read the disclaimer for hotel safes in foreign countries. Most hotels will not be liable for any loss, even if it is their safe, because several people will have the combination. Over and over people have had money or valuables stolen out of foreign hotel rooms. Always take a suitcase or briefcase that locks. A cloth suitcase can be cut open, but a hard side suitcase with tab locks is a good deterrent to theft. I put my valuables in a hardside or keep them always on my person. My money and passport stay on me at all times. There are money security belts, bracelets, collars, and ankle bands to keep your money safely on yourself. Just do not let anyone see where you keep your money and passport.

Passports

A U.S. passport is worth \$3000 in some countries. They do get stolen, even at gunpoint. Always make a copy of your plane tickets and passport to keep in a place separate from your originals. Replacement is much faster if you have your ticket or passport numbers. You normally must purchase new tickets if yours are stolen. Also, you may have to wait two weeks for your new passport to be issued by the U.S. Embassy.

Visa

A Visa is a stamp placed in your passport by a foreign government that will permit you to enter their country for a specified period of time. Normally, you will need to fill out a form before receiving the stamp and with some countries, submit one or more photographs with a fee in advance of your travel. Some countries require six months left on your passport and some require more than two blank pages for entry and exit stamps.

Documents

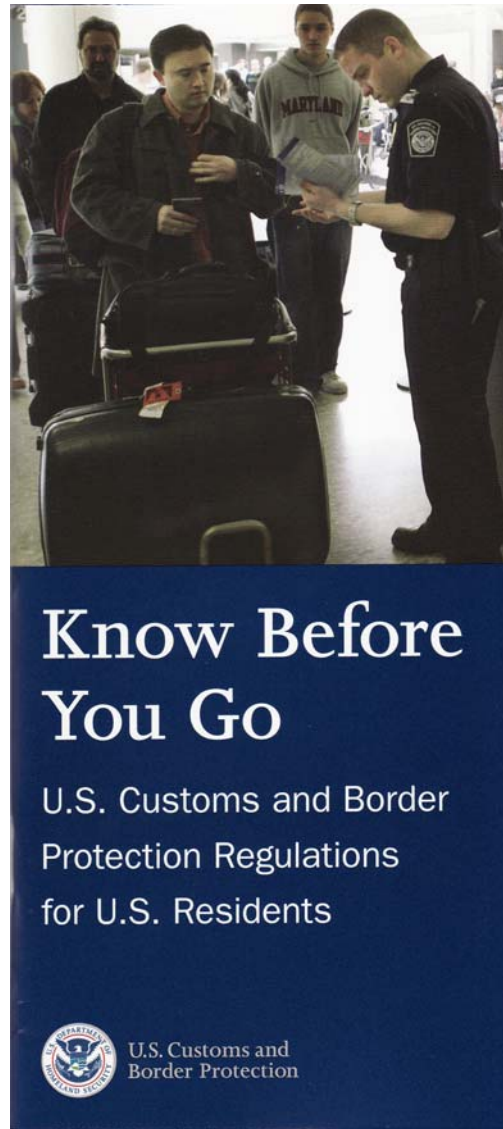
I go a step further by taking reduced, laminated copies of my dental degree, state dental license and federal drug license. These documents go with me everywhere. On several occasions overseas, I have had to produce my credentials for officials of the government while working on location. Once I was stopped upon re-entering the U.S. and asked about all the needles they saw in the x-ray of my suitcase. Your documents will save embarrassment in these circumstances. **BE PREPARED.**

Declaration

You must declare all articles acquired abroad when you return to the United States. Be sure that those items are legal to bring back into the country. There are restricted and prohibited items which could land you in jail if they are found in your possession, when returning from a trip overseas. **KNOW BEFORE YOU GO**, to avoid embarrassments upon returning from your trip.

Prohibited and Restricted Articles

Most restricted and prohibited items are common sense, articles such as alcohol, tobacco, and firearms. Other items would be plants, animals, drugs, pornography, poisons, antiques, or copyrighted articles. It would be a good idea to get the **U.S. Customs Service and Border Protection Guide** entitled "**KNOW BEFORE YOU Go.**" It is filled with good information about what you can and cannot do. It also has lots of telephone numbers and information at www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel that will give you direct access to comprehensive information.



www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel

Travel Insurance

Travel abroad can be an enlightening experience, but what would happen if you became ill or injured while away from home? Most people assume they will be covered by their standard medical plan. But your domestic medical coverage may not be designed for international travel. Travel insurance is relatively inexpensive. Be sure to get a plan that includes evacuation coverage. Below is just a few examples.

AAA

www.aaa.com

Check with your local AAA

Community Insurance Agency

800-344-9540

www.visitorsinsurance.com

Dissinger Insurance Services

913-491-6385

800-386-9183

info@dissingerinsurance.com

www.dissingerinsurance.com/missions.html

eGlobal Health Insurance

417-882-1413

www.eglobalhealth.com

Go Mission Trip

888-811-4626

www.gomissiontrip.com

International Medical Group

800-628-4664

www.imglobal.com

International Plan

480-659-9846

888-825-9777

www.internationalplan.com

Kuffel, Collimore & Company

800-488-4302

630-221-6000

www.missionaryinsurance.com

Missionary Health

480-821-9052

800-647-4589

www.missionaryhealth.net

NRIOL

877-593-5403

www.nriol.net

Travel Guard International

800-826-4919

www.travelguard.com

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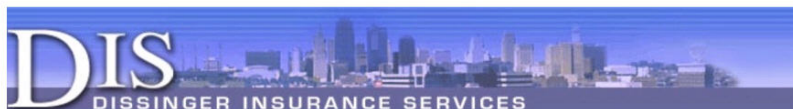
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