

Tips on Travelling

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Travelling and crossing borders is 'normal' life for most missionaries. It could also be a source of great frustration and even a real cause for worry. Missionaries who work in creative access countries or in countries with not a lot of resources, could face some moral issues when questions are asked like '*What are you coming to do*', '*Why are you travelling in and out of the country so much*', or '*Why do you bring in so many things*'.

A good article to read, is '*Following Jesus in a glocalised world*' by Rick Love.

Prayer is vital (prayer for favour with immigration officials, and safe travels). Involve your prayer supporters by asking them to pray when you cross borders. Let them know when you have safely entered the country.

Therefore, *clothe yourselves with the full armour of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. (Eph 6:11-12)*

SECURITY

On international flights you are not allowed to bring in lots of liquids on board. Any liquid or gel (moisturiser, toothpaste, etc) must be in a 100ml container or smaller. All of your liquids/gels must then be put into a transparent bag (like a ziplock) that is no bigger than 10cm x 10cm. Please check the rules of the airline you are flying with.

1. Pack all your liquids/gels in a ziplock bag in advance and have them in your carry-on ready to show at security.
2. If you use chronic medicine, have a copy of the doctor's prescription together with the medicine.
3. Don't wear lots of jewellery, big belts or big shoes for your flight - you'll probably need to remove them all to be scanned at security, and a buckle can set off the alarm when you go through the scanner.
4. Don't joke around or make a fuss at security. The goal is just to get through as quickly as possible.
5. Take any laptop computers out of your hand baggage - it needs to be scanned separately at security
6. Try not to look nervous, even if you are. Some airports have security people studying the body language of people passing through. If they think you are a threat of any kind, you can be taken out of the line for questioning.

IMMIGRATION

Always keep it in the back of your mind, that immigration officials have the power to deny you entry into the country. It doesn't matter if they are right or wrong – they have the power to deny you or allow you in. Your behaviour will control their discretion if there is a grey area.

1. Dress appropriately

Appearance matters. Don't pre-dispose someone to judge you because you look sloppy. Take off your sunglasses. First impressions matter.

2. Be prepared

If you turn up at the immigration counter without your forms filled in, or filled in incorrectly, they will send you back to the end, and could penalize you (by ignoring you, or taking a lot of time to check everything). You need to do everything you can to make the immigration officers' life easier. They have enough hassle in a day. Turn up with your forms clearly and correctly filled in, and ask for help if you need it.

Sometimes countries will require proof of your return airfare and/or your accommodation in order for you to clear immigration. Have proof of hotel reservations; if you have been invited by someone, have their information (names, address, and tel number) ready.

Know how much money you have on you. If you start fumbling when they ask you questions, it could give the impression that you are lying or trying to hide something.

Do not offer extra documentation or letters unless asked for. Have everything ready though. Use a plastic folder, and put everything in there. If they give you a slip or any receipts, put it in the folder. Do not throw anything away they give you. You will probably need it when leaving the country again.

3. Wait your turn

Stand behind the line, wait your turn and wait until the immigration official calls you. Do not climb through the ropes, even though there is no one else in line. It feels very stupid and a waste of time to walk all the way through the lanes, but that is the correct thing to do.

4. Engage and be friendly

Be friendly and greet them. Courtesy goes a long way. Usually, they smile and respond. All of these little things make a difference and gives you favour with them.

Security at airports is taken very seriously. Do not make any jokes, especially about bombs, being a terrorist or derogatory statements about their country/religion. Cross-cultural jokes can be misunderstood so rather avoid it.

Airports are not places for jokes or humour...especially ones made in poor taste. If they make a joke, laugh politely.

5. Always answer simply, clearly and do not offer excess information

When they ask you a question, answer it with the minimum information. Be specific, clear and brief. Whatever you do, don't offer them more than needed. Do not be overly chatty to your immigration officer - just answer their questions and keep it simple.

The immigration officers – especially the very experienced ones in secondary inspection – know their stuff. They can see your travel history. And they see people like you every day. So don't insult them by lying or pretending you don't speak their language when you do. They get really angry and can deny you entry into the country.

Having good answers to difficult questions takes wisdom and prayer.

6. Never, ever, think you are an immigration expert

Do not argue with them, or trying to tell them what to do. It could help to open up your passport at the page where the last stamp was made. If they can't find the stamp, wait patiently. Do not offer to help them – they perceive it as you telling them they do not know how to do their job. They do not like this!!

7. If they send you to secondary inspection, smile and comply

If you travel a lot, you will probably go into secondary inspection at some stage. The primary officers will refer anything they are unsure about. If you're not doing anything wrong, don't worry about it. It's a process and it can take anything from 30 minutes to 5 hours or more, depending on how busy they are. Do NOT show impatience.

8. Do not use your cell phone when in line or at the counter

Do not start using your cellphone. Put it on 'silent' or switch it off when going through immigration. It's forbidden in most countries. Also be mindful that they may confiscate your cellphone or laptop and read the contents. Be careful of what you text and email – even jokingly.

CUSTOMS

Usually customs requires you to complete a declaration about what items you are bringing into a country. The average traveller would probably never declare anything, but it might involve declaring some food or alcohol, but not much else.

Before making your way to customs you should make sure that you have thrown away any food you may have taken from the plane, as well as any fresh fruit and vegetables, the vast majority of which are prohibited from being brought into foreign countries for quarantine purposes.

If in doubt, declare it!

Customs officials vary in their severity around the world - in some cases they issue on-the-spot fines for failing to declare restricted items.

In some countries they X-ray all incoming bags before you are allowed to walk out of the terminal, in others you can pick your bag off a carousel and basically walk through without answering any questions or declaration at all. Just be honest, declare anything you have that you're not sure about and you will always be fine.

Thank God that you made it through!