

What to take abroad for a long-term mission

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Check passport is valid for the whole period. Get a new one if necessary.

Get visa. The Passport Office will issue you with a second passport if you travel abroad frequently, so you can leave one passport with an embassy while you are travelling abroad with another. There can be long delays, so start as soon as possible.

HEALTH

Get a medical check-up

To confirm you are fit for the job

To identify any diseases that need precautions

To get medicines that may not be available at the other end, such as insulin.

To find out what immunizations are necessary. To get advice? Your local GP is unlikely to know anything much.

Get immunizations and inoculations for everything. Check with your doctor and travel helpline 0891 224 100 or 0705 55 39 33. There is usually a local BA health centre which will advise you. Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad (MASTA) at London School of hygiene and Tropical Medicine 01716379899 has a helpline. Requirements vary by area but usually include:

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis A

TAB

Tetanus

Yellow fever

Polio

TB

Meningitis

Diphtheria (in the USSR)

Rabies (if you are working with animals)

Japanese encephalitis (in some countries)

Cholera is not recommended by the World Health Organization. It does not work, makes you overconfident and may make you a carrier.

Find out what malaria pills to take for prevention and emergency treatment. Take some with you, but they are far cheaper abroad. In some countries you may then be advised by local doctors that the risk and side effects mean that they do not use them themselves. Precautions include wearing long trousers and long-sleeved shirts at night, wearing dark socks at night, using insect repellent, keeping windows closed, having mesh windows, spraying all bedrooms every evening.

Take basic medicines including sticking plaster, aspirin, fungicide, antiseptic, thermometer etc. Even if they are available locally, it may be difficult to explain your needs: I spent two hours unsuccessfully trying to explain the concept of indigestion tablets to a Romanian chemist through an interpreter.

Imodium and rehydration salts are absolutely essential. Virtually any diahoerrea - including cholera - can be treated by one Imodium followed by rehydration salts for a day or two. Remember that it is the dehydration that does the serious damage. If it hangs on for more than three or four days, see the doctor, it may be guardia or amoebic dysentery. In a country like Pakistan, you can expect to have diahoerrea one day in three when travelling.

Take sunscreens and hats.

Take water purifying tablets. Most filters only remove gross dirt and leave bacteria. Good ones claim to remove bacteria and even viruses. Maybe. Boil for ten minutes when possible.

Always have your own first aid kit, including disposable syringes etc.

Embassies have clean blood plasma, but do not rely on ours.

Unless you are living in a big city in a rich country, it is unlikely that doctors will have the right equipment. Phone SAFA medical supply. They give a range of appropriate kits, going up to the 'Up country kit' designed to give everything you need, including two litres of plasma replacement, surgical needles, etc. Ask them to include lancets and surgical gloves which do not come as standard. The kit does not include medicines. It is expensive, but not when you consider the alternatives.

Get spare spectacles. It is certainly possible to get very cheap spectacles in countries like Pakistan or Turkey, but in our experience they are so badly made that they can damage your eyes permanently.

Have your teeth checked. You will not fancy going to a dentist in a country where 20% of the population are HIV positive.

If you are a member of a private health scheme like BUPA, tell them, as your UK subscriptions will not cover you.

FINANCE

Get travel insurance for the full period.

Tell your bank manager you are going. It is possible to get your credit card paid off each month by your bank, for instance.

Get National Insurance Guide for People Abroad.

Get tax advice. Your liability is very different if you are a consultant and if you are an employee. If you do not know what you are doing, you may come home for your mother's birthday and find that you are liable for a year's UK tax.

Get Expatriates Contingent Tax policy which gives you insurance cover against having to pay tax in the UK because you were forced to return early. Try Horncastle Young (Services) Ltd, 11 Forest Lane London E15.

Consider kidnapping insurance, which also covers deportation.

Get enough currency or travellers cheques to see you through the first month. Things often go wrong with the company's or client's arrangements.

If you are letting your own home, it is essential to get advice from a solicitor, as well as any estate agent you are using. Also consider the tax implications.

Consider security implications of leaving your property empty.

Take addresses, fax, telephone and e-mail of bank, solicitor, estate agent, friends, company etc. Also have as many contact addresses as possible in the country you are going to.

I. Take British stamps. Friends flying home will be happy to take letters home and post them for you, but if they are unstamped, they may not get round to it for a week or two after arrival.

CLOTHES

Get advice from people who have been there before. It is pointless to have five suits when you go to Dar es Salaam, where cotton trousers and short shirt are normal - suits would be unbearably hot. Beware advice lists written by the Foreign Office, UN representative or anyone else on the cocktail circuit - one list insisted that ladies should have long gloves for evenings in Dar es Salaam, which is as informal as anywhere.

In some countries e.g. Zimbabwe, South Africa, Philippines, you will have no trouble in getting the clothes cheaply locally. Elsewhere they may be unavailable, designed for other cultures (e.g. saris), or designed for the very small. Similarly with shoes. Find out.

Swimming costumes and sports clothes. The climate in Africa, Asia, South America, means that sports clubs are the social centres.