Being There

1. Overview

The purpose of this document is to make helpful suggestions while serving. There are two other documents “Getting Ready,” which has suggestions for before you leave for service and “Returning Home” which is for when you return home.

1. Culture Shock

**Defining Culture**

The first thing you may notice in another country is people’s behavior. How they greet each other, eat, sleep, walk, read, and work in various ways that may be different from your own. These differences in behavior are determined by their values, ideas, and beliefs they hold about life. Without knowing the language, it is often impossible to really understand a new culture.

**Culture makes life meaningful.** It answers the basic human questions all people face. These answers provide logic to those within the culture which outsiders may not understand.

**A few implications.**

**Different is not bad**—Each culture operates by its own innate logic. Do not condemn people whose customs are not like yours, as if they deliberately chose a perverted way of life.

**Cultures resist change**—Since culture embraces all aspects of life, be aware people already have a set of answers to their questions and way of life. This may make some resistant to any change that would mean a difference in worldview.

**The Gospel is an agent of change**—To effectively serve, first seek to understand a culture within its own context.

**Witness by offering solutions to cultural problems**— Because no society is perfectly integrated, look for chances to witness through the problems and questions people cannot answer from within their own cultural understanding.

**Credibility determines the level of trust**—When you lack credibility in the eyes of those you seek to serve, your message will be rejected. If they sense your sincerity, they may be more open to the message.

**Cross Cultural Misunderstandings**

Our culture determines what feels normal and right to us. But other cultures have ways to live that may seem strange to outsiders. These differences may lead to misunderstandings and prejudice. Be aware of the following:

**Physical Adjustments**—Food, hygiene, and living conditions may be different than what you are used to. But the body will adjust, and you *can* learn to eat new food!

**Interpersonal Relationships**—Learn how to relate to friends, co-workers, people in authority and a seller at the local market. How to dress, to greet someone, with what greeting and how warmly.

**Rules of Politeness, Etiquette and Friendship**—How do men and women behave? What is “proper” and “dignified?” For example: how do you say “no” where such behavior may seem rude?

**Use of Time**—To shop, cook, do laundry may take longer. What is considered late? In some cultures, it is impolite to be more than a few minutes late. In others, only servants are “on time.”

**Use of space (territorially)** —Standing close to a person may be invading “personal space” in some cultures. In many places, women and children sit on different sides of the church from the men.

**Communication**—What about touching and body movements? Modest behavior in one culture may be inappropriate elsewhere. Showing respect is an important aspect. Silence can be offensive in some cultures, while it is expected in certain situations in other cultures.

The list for cultural misunderstandings is endless. Behaviors are linked to values and beliefs that may differ dramatically from your own.

**Four Stages of Culture Shock**

Most people who spend a good amount of time in a country go through four stages of culture shock. Be prepared to experience the following:

**Stage 1**—You feel positively euphoric at first. The accommodations are adequate, the tourist sights are intriguing, and the local people are courteous and helpful. You think a wonderful experience lies ahead. This is the Honeymoon phase.

**Stage 2**—Wham! Suddenly everything seems problematic. Misunderstandings seem frequent, the gratitude you expected for your help seems lacking, the people may not seem friendly after all, business methods are different, your job satisfaction level is low and perhaps you develop health problems. You may feel like giving up and going home.

**Stage 3**—You begin to understand some of the behaviors of the people, and perhaps enough of the language so that isolation is not so complete. Some of the strange ways begin to make sense and, little by little, problems are worked out and the situation does not seem hopeless after all. Efforts to make friends begin to pay off and you begin to laugh again. You are on the road to recovery.

**Stage 4—**You can accept the customs of the country even if you aren’t enthusiastic about them. Some of your working relationships may be difficult, but the basic anxieties are gone, and you gain some sense of satisfaction in your work. Sometimes you realize you are getting a kick out of the experience. You feel comfortable again, you have made some good friends and you will miss them when you leave.

[**Tips for Surviving Culture Shock**](http://www.adventistvolunteers.org/BeingThere/survivingCultureShock.htm)

The difficulties that cause culture shock are very real. How long does culture shock last? Resilient people are over it in three months. Some people may recover in less than six months. For others, it can last as long as a year. The severity of culture shock depends upon several factors: personality, the extent of the differences between your culture and the culture in which you are serving, and the way you deal with new situations.

Does one case of culture shock immunize against future attacks? NO! Future cases may not be as bad, but different experiences can cause culture shock to resurface. There is no immunization that will prevent culture shock. But knowing that it exists, that an overseas assignment is likely to bring it on and that it is not permanent, helps to reduce the severity of the attack. Those who expect culture shock deal with the problem much more easily than those who don’t expect it.

* Recognize culture shock. Don’t deny it. Those who feel they are immune to it may get an even worse case!
* Set goals that are realistic within the context of your new home.
* Allow time for weekly relaxation and recreation.
* Learn as much as you can about the country and its culture before arriving. Try to appreciate unfamiliar ways of doing things. They are, in reality, just different ways to deal with life’s problems and joys.
* Study the language and observe non-verbal forms of communication. Improve your communication skills.
* Try not to offend, to be offended or to get entangled in cultural misunderstandings.
* Be open-minded about the culture and be tolerant and accepting of the aspects of it with which you are unfamiliar.
* Don’t isolate yourself. Culture shock will pass as you learn to bond with people and appreciate your host culture’s ways of coping with life and its challenges.
* Record your observations and reflections in a journal. This will give a wealth of insight when debriefing with friends and co-workers, and also when returning home.

3. Be Professional

Be prepared for adjustments in your assignment when you arrive. Being flexible is important to having a great experience. Changes may be due to circumstances at the Receiving Organization, changes in personnel or even the realization that you might better fit doing other duties because of your personality or skill level.

Consider cultural differences that could affect the results of your assignment, such as: gender roles, language barriers, immodest dress, lack of resources, etc. Be prepared to deviate from the original plan as circumstances change. Consider the long-term, create a project able to sustain itself after you leave.

Not everything can be learned in a year. Think of living for one year in another culture to being in the first grade of elementary school. It’s just the beginning of cultural education about that country! You’ll get the basics, but there is much more to learn.

Keep in mind you are a guest, not a citizen, in your country of service. Strive to:

* feel honored to be living in the country where you are serving, and let the locals know this.
* be grateful you can live in and learn about their culture.
* make a practice of expressing your gratitude to the people of the country.
* spend time appreciating their culture. Seek out and concentrate on the beauty of the culture.
* listen before judging. There are usually good reasons why people do things, but they may not always be obvious. Do not be hasty in your conclusions.
* be careful about mentioning your impressions to people. When stating your views, use a description of your position, not a judgment of the people you are serving or their country. Be careful not to condemn what you may not understand.
* be humble as you seek to serve. It is easy to be unintentionally condescending.
* recognize the significance of the customs and traditions. For example, people from some cultures might be insulted if you imitate their dress or participate in their traditional events, while people from other cultures will be flattered.
* respect cultural characteristics and distinctiveness, even if you do not understand or agree with them.
* realize things may happen slower than you thought they would because of the language barrier, your own adjustment period and/or local conditions.
* be flexible and adapt to the situation. Flexibility is a key factor when serving in another country.
* determined to stick it out. You may get sick, homesick or may just need time alone. Determine to work through these instead of letting them influence you to return home early.
* possess a teachable spirit. The way of doing things in your culture is not the only way. Learn from those you serve. You will learn an incredibly valuable perspective on life.

4. Teacher Responsibilities

If you are serving as a teacher, remember *you are the heart of the classroom.* The job of teaching comes with high expectations and serious responsibilities. You are partly responsible for the good of the school, the reputation of the school, and the well-being of the students.

* Maintain a high degree of professionalism.
* Dress appropriately.
* Be punctual. Greet your students as they arrive. Allow extra time to arrive
* Keep proper attendance and progress reports for each student.
* In all things, show your students that you respect and value them.
* Demonstrate the love and concern of our heavenly Father.
* Attend and participate in staff worships, council meetings, school retreats, Friday evening meetings, Sabbath School programs and church services.

**Orientation—**You may be given a brief orientation to your new “home” and be shown everything you need to know in order to start teaching. It will be confusing at first but ask questions (and more questions) until you understand your duties.

If you do not live at the school, allow extra travel time for late buses, heavy traffic, etc. Being late negatively affects your students’ respect for you as a professional. Your students are paying for their time with you and your tardiness robs them of this time.

Arrive early for staff meetings because school administrators’ time is also valuable.

**Professional Appearance—**As a foreign teacher, a professional appearance helps to maintain positive perceptions of Christianity along with discipline and dignity in the classroom. Follow the dress code guidelines, dress conservatively. Avoid see-through tops, t-shirts or shirts with slogans/ads written on them, athletic-style clothes and shoes, any jewelry and unusual hairstyles.

**Time Off—**Between and/or during school terms there should be time off for rest and relaxation. Other than that, your presence at extra-curricular activities and weekend activities is vital towards supporting the school administration and promoting an enthusiastic and positive atmosphere on campus.

**Substitute Teaching—**If you become ill, there may be no one to cover your classes unless a colleague can do double duty. Therefore, you may need to teach even when you are not feeling your best. When you just cannot make it to class, notify the school administration as early as possible.

When fellow volunteers are ill, do all you can to help them. Offer to teach one of their classes if you have a free period. You may also offer to pick up groceries or medicine for them, or just stop by with a word of comfort. Being sick in a foreign country can be discouraging, and sometimes scary.

**Spiritual Responsibilities—**Regardless of your position title and job description, your greatest responsibility is to be a ***Christian***volunteer, representing Adventist values and beliefs that are so important to the mission of the organization where you serve.

**Attend Sabbath Services—**This is an important part of your mission as a volunteer. Friday evenings are often a special time when you can share with your colleagues and/or students about your relationship with Jesus. Attending Sabbath School and church services helps support the local church and is a good witness to your colleagues and/or students.

**Building Bridges—**The spirituality of a new Christian may develop gradually, and one might not see the fruits of your labor while on assignment. Therefore, helping new friends, colleagues and/or students connect with local church members, will help ground them in Christianity and develop lasting connections with the Church.

**Encourage Colleagues and/or Students—**Offer to organize times and programs for spiritual regeneration with colleagues and/or students. Study, sing and pray together in small groups (2 Chronicles 7:14). Include the administration and specific needs of your organization along with colleagues/fellow teachers and/or students in prayer.

**Conduct—**Be an effective Christian witness at all times. Questionable conduct, such as going to bars or nightclubs, disregarding dress codes, skipping spiritual gatherings, questioning church/organization guidelines or policies in front of staff or students, is disrespectful, hurtful and harmful to your Receiving Organization. Do not use alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs and/or tobacco while serving as a volunteer. Volunteers who do any of these things may be subject to disciplinary action and could be sent home early.

5. Relationships

**With Leadership**

* Look to your Supervisor and receiving organization leaders for guidance. Respect their authority; they know the mission of the organization and how you can help achieve that mission.
* Sometimes position assignments need to be adapted or even changed after the arrival of a volunteer. Circumstances or personnel may change. The receiving organization may discover you have other skills more desperately needed, or they may discover your skills do not match their needs. Changes may need to be negotiated but do your best to adapt and fit into their mission.

**With Colleagues and/or Students**

* Healthy social relationships are encouraged. Friendship evangelism underlies spiritual outreach and is the most interesting and stimulating part of a mission experience.
* Maintain a high standard of conduct. Dating and time-monopolizing relationships usually distract from the main purpose of the work you were called to do. Because of this and because of the cultural implications in many countries, dating is not allowed, whether with fellow volunteers or the local people. However, group activities are very rewarding. Colleagues/students will be delighted to take you to places of cultural interest and show you the countryside.

**With Roommates**

* Make your “home” a haven where you and your roommate(s) can rest and regenerate your spiritual and physical energy.
* Schedule adequate time for sleep and relaxation. Working and witnessing are both demanding activities. You must maintain your physical and mental health.
* Respect your roommate’s space, time, and belongings.
* Clean up after yourself, especially the bathroom, kitchen, and other common spaces. Crumbs and overflowing garbage attract unwelcome insects, such as ants and cockroaches.
* Check with your supervisor, keeping pets in your “home” is usually not allowed.
* Keep your room neat.

**Visitors**

* Consider your roommate’s needs and feelings before inviting guests to your “home.” Overnight guests are discouraged. Never invite strangers or members of the opposite sex to your home when you are alone.
* Ask your supervisor for guidance about local curfews so that you may live within the protection and respect of your colleagues and administrators.

6. Language

Living in a country without knowing the language is a challenge. Knowledge of a country’s language will give insight into that country’s culture, history, and politics. Thus, volunteer service will be doubly valuable if one makes an effort to learn the local language. The sooner one begins, the better.

Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. People generally appreciate one’s efforts to speak their language and are eager to help. They may even find your accent funny. It’s a great way to make friends.

7. Staying Healthy

Good health contributes to happy attitudes and good work. A wise volunteer will do everything possible to maintain good health.

Most international volunteer deaths are caused by accidents! Driving conditions may be hazardous, particularly when driving motorcycles, and traffic laws and customs differ widely. Ask for and follow the policy and/or recommendations of your receiving organization. Don’t take risks!

For a Christian, illicit sex is forbidden. Not only is it sin, but in today’s world it is foolhardy and very high-risk behavior.

Acclimatization to the weather usually occurs within the first week or two. Adequate rest, less exercise, appropriate clothing, slow exposure to the sun, and eating a balanced diet is helpful. Greater fluid and salt intake will counter extra sweating. At higher altitudes, you may feel fatigued for several weeks. Rest more than usual and avoid strenuous exercise.

Tropical heat is not difficult to adapt to, although children and young people are less affected than older people. However, since their skin tends to be more moist, young people suffer more frequently from skin disorders, such as fungal infections, when they are in tropical climates.

To adapt more easily to tropical heat:

* greatly increase fluid intake,
* add salt to food,
* defer strenuous activity until the cooler part of the day,
* wear clothing and socks made of cotton (synthetic materials do not absorb moisture and ventilate poorly),
* wear white or light-colored fabrics,
* wear a light hat with a brim,
* minimize exposure to the sun, particularly during the first few days,
* use sunscreen, and
* avoid wearing sneakers and footwear with rubber soles

If you experience mild swelling of the ankles in the tropics, elevate your legs when possible. Avoid tight clothing, belts, socks with elasticized tops, and garments held up with elastic around the waist.

Malaria is still the most widespread of all human diseases and is prevalent in large parts of Central and South America, Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific. Prevention is important, but nowhere is malaria prophylaxis a legal requirement. In some countries, the disease is confined to limited, rural areas. To deter insect bites:

* wear light-colored clothing (dark colors attract mosquitoes),
* use mosquito-repellent lotions or sprays,
* wear long sleeves and pants,
* take preventive medication regularly,
* avoid perfume, toilet water, scented soaps, and after-shave lotions,
* use mosquito nets and window screens.

Insects can transmit various infections other than malaria. Use precautions, especially in the tropics. Repellents containing at least 35% DEET sprayed or applied to the skin and clothing will help keep them away. Such repellents are harmless to humans if hands are washed before eating. However, toxic insecticides are different from repellents. If a room is sprayed with a toxic insecticide, stay out of it for at least half an hour. For insect-infested regions, use generous applications of insect repellent and a mosquito net (nylon is better than cotton) when sleeping in an unscreened room. Ticks should be removed with tweezers, with a minimum of squeezing and applying a drop of gasoline, alcohol, or iodine first will help prevent the tick’s head from breaking off.

Contaminated beverages and waterspread diarrheal disease, typhoid, polio, Hepatitis A, cholera, and other illnesses. Usually “natural” or tap water is not safe to drink. In many countries, untreated water may contain parasites and amoeba that can cause serious and/or long-term health problems. Immunization is never 100% effective.

Tap water, even in expensive hotels, may not be safe to drink. Follow these tips:

* Avoid fresh fruit juices which are often mixed with untreated tap water.
* Avoid water and ice cubes from pitchers/carafes which are often made with untreated tap water.
* Do not brush teeth with untreated water.
* Tap water, if hot enough to be uncomfortable on the hand, is safe (after cooling) for oral hygiene, diluting drinks, or washing eating utensils.
* Do not swallow shower or bath water.
* People do ***not*** become immune to contaminated water if they drink it long enough.
* Carbonated soft drinks and mineral water, hot tea and coffee made with boiled water are considered safe to drink (the caffeine is better than the risk of an infectious agent). Be sure bottled drinks are opened in front of you.
* Swimming, wading and even touching water in some ponds, lakes or puddles is unwise.

If local water is not safe and bottled water is not available, there are three alternatives:

* Boil the water at a rolling boil, for at least 10 minutes.
* Use a chemical treatment such as water purification tablets. Place five drops of 2% or 2.5% Tincture of Iodine in one liter of water and let it stand for 30 minutes; use 10 drops per liter if water is cold or cloudy. Mix with a powdered juice mix, a squeeze of citrus fruit, or a pinch of salt to make the taste acceptable.
* Use a Clorox bleach solution, one capful of bleach per 2 gallons of water.

Foodcan cause just as many problems as water! The safest rule in some countries is to “peel it, cook it, or forget it!” Follow these tips:

* Avoid raw foods.
* Avoid dishes made with mayonnaise, dressings, custards, and cream fillings.
* Raw salad vegetables need to be cleaned with soap and water or soaked for 30 minutes in a liter of water with 15 drops Tincture of Iodine, and then rinsed in cooled, boiled water.
* Eat fresh fruits only when you can peel them yourself.
* Keep food well covered and refrigerated. Avoid reheated leftovers.
* Use only pasteurized dairy products or powdered milk (made with purified water). You can pasteurize milk by bringing it to the boil and then immediately remove it from the heat. Canned evaporated or condensed milk is safe and available in most places. Add cooled, boiled water to dilute. In some countries, “pasteurized” is no guarantee that the proper heating process was used. Ice cream and other milk/cream products are foods to avoid altogether in most tropical countries.
* Spicy cuisine does not decrease contamination levels or protect against pathogens.

Diarrhea is the most frequent health problem for travelers to developing countries. Impure water, poor sanitation and unhygienic handling of food all contribute to the risk of getting diarrhea. If diarrhea develops:

* stop eating solid foods.
* drink broths, soups, fruit juice and soft drinks (3+ liters a day).
* drink a large glass of fluid after every watery bowel movement and when thirsty.
* replace water, salt, sugar, and potassium lost with diarrhea.

8. Extending Service

If you would like to extend your service, keep the following guidelines in mind:

* Discuss it with your supervisor. If agreed, your supervisor should request an extension on the GC AVS DB. Once an extension assignment has been voted through MPPC your Sending Division Volunteer Coordinator should notify you. Check your volunteer home page. If your status is “Extended,” an insurance extension has been processed for you, if your status is “Extended (needing insurance),” an insurance extension has not been processed for you and you should contact your Receiving Division Volunteer Coordinator and ask them to extend your insurance.
* ASV insurance automatically expires 31 days after the voted end date of the volunteer’s service.
* If you take a break of more than two months (8 weeks) from your Receiving Organization, it will be considered the beginning of a new assignment rather than an extension. In this case, you will need to reapply by logging onto your volunteer home page. When you reapply, most of your information will be transferred from your previous application, so there is very little you will have to do.
* If you serve more than THREE years, you are required to sign the Volunteer Extension and Declaration form indicating you do not expect to receive the same services or benefits offered to church employees (retirement benefits, service credit, etc.). See the Agreements section of your application for more information.
* If you wish to transfer from one assignment to another, work with your Receiving Division Coordinator.

9. Handling Conflict

Every culture has its own, often unwritten, rules for handling differences in an appropriate way. Ask:

* How does my host culture approach conflict? Who has authority? How are decisions made? What are the social roles?
* How much power does a leader have in comparison with other people?
* How much freedom do individuals have to make their own decisions?
* What are the biblical principles I can use to interact redemptively?

If you are currently facing a conflict, try the following steps:

* Try to work interpersonal conflicts out in a Christ-like manner.
* Speak with your Receiving Organization supervisor. Ask for counsel.
* If your first discussion with the individual concerned is ineffective, take a third person along and try again.
* If the problem still isn’t solved, seek advice and support from your Receiving Division Volunteer Coordinator.
* If you still do not have a resolution, please alert the GC AVS Office. Document all the steps taken to solve the problem so that they can ascertain where the system has not worked. The staff will do their best to work with you on any unresolved issues.

**Christian Philosophy for Handling Conflicts**

In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus instructs his disciples how to deal with conflict in the church, giving the following counsel:

* Restrict the scope of the disagreement to “just between the two of you.”
* “Take one or two others along” if the first discussion is ineffective.
* If the next discussion is ineffective, “Tell it to the church.”

Read the whole chapter of Matthew 18, especially verses 4, 14, 19, 23, and 35. Jesus stressed qualities like humility, sensitivity, compassion, unity, servanthood, and a forgiving spirit. Use the principles outlined in the chapter. Matthew 18 emphasizes the importance of respect for others in human relationships. It also states that differences should be reconciled, and problems resolved in a spirit of humility and Christian love.

10. Photography Guidelines

Whether video or still, a camera enables you to discover new things, meet people and share what you’ve learned. Many people consider it an invasion of privacy when a picture of them or something belonging to them is taken without permission. Therefore, remember to be sensitive and thoughtful.

* Ask the local people to show you around. They will know the opportune/appropriate times, places, people, and things for you to take pictures of.
* Ask your subject for permission. This shows a genuine interest, as well as courtesy.
* Sharing your photos strengthens friendship ties, opens doors to what others think, and allows people to speak for themselves.

Often “*exotic*” pictures get the biggest reaction but ask yourself how fair a representation of the culture/country your photos are. For a well-rounded photographic story of any society, include photos of the following:

**People**—Old, young, and in between; rich, poor, and middle class.

**Scenery**—Communities, cityscapes, landscapes, and everything in between.

**Everyday Activities**—Distinct foods, clothing, utensils, houses, animals, meals, and routines.

**Special Events**—Festivals, ceremonies, and parades. (Ask permission first as these may be inappropriate.)

**Industry**—Keep in mind the society’s laborers. Factory workers, shoe shiners, musicians, housekeepers . . . anyone that generates economic security.

**Historic Monuments**—Buildings, memorials, statues, battlefields etc.

**Sequences**—A series of pictures over a period like the building of a house or a ceremony.

**The Intangible**—Emotions, feelings, moments, values.

We would love to consider your stories and pictures for publication in the *Mission 360* magazine. Send all editorial correspondence to:

Adventist Volunteer Service Publications

12501 Old Columbia Pike

Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 or [nielsenc@gc.adventist.org](mailto:nielsenc@gc.adventist.org)

11. Traveling While on Assignment

When you are given time off or a break between school terms or projects, you will want to see the surrounding area. Before you set off, discuss the details of your destination(s), scheduled time of return, and a phone number where you can be reached in case of emergency with your supervisor. Keeping your supervisor fully informed is not only a courtesy to your hosts, but it is also a safety precaution.

Travel with at least one other person; consider hiring or find a local guide to show you around. As well as being helpful, a local person can give you protection (see the “Safety” section under the **Getting Ready** document).

**Safety Tips While Traveling!**

**Safety in Your Hotel**

* Keep your hotel door always locked! Meet visitors in the lobby.
* Use the safe in your room. Do not leave money or other valuables in your hotel room while out.
* If you will return late, let someone know when you expect to return.
* Be aware of suspicious-looking persons, for example, avoid getting on an elevator with them.
* Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room. Locate the nearest fire exit and alternate exits. Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit in case you must crawl through a smoke-filled corridor.

**Safety on Public Transportation**

* Use onlytaxis clearly identified with official markings.
* Well-organized robbery of passengers is a serious problem on trains, especially at night. Food or drink from strangers could be drugged, criminals may spray sleeping gas in train compartments. Lock your compartment or take turns sleeping in shifts with traveling companions. If alone, secure your luggage, strap your valuables to you and/or sleep on top of them.

**Safety When You Drive**

* Keep car doors locked and windows always shut. Wear the seat belt. Open windows allow opportunities for thieves to snatch a purse etc.
* Avoid driving at night**.**
* Keep valuables out of sight or locked in the trunk/boot.
* Avoid parking the car on the street overnight. If a secure site is not available, select a well-lit area.
* Never pick up hitchhikers.
* Don’t get out of the car if there are suspicious looking individuals nearby. Drive away.

**Patterns of Crime Against Motorists**

* “Defensive driving” means more than avoiding auto accidents; it means watching for potential criminal pedestrians, cyclists, and scooter riders.
* Carjackers and thieves operate at gas stations, in parking lots, in city traffic and along the highway. Be suspicious of anyone who tries to get your attention.
* Criminals may masquerade as good Samaritans. They may ask for assistance and then steal your luggage or car. They often work in groups, one carrying on the pretense while the other robs you.
* Other criminals try to push you off the road or cause an “accident” by rear-ending you. In some urban areas, thieves’ simply smash car windows at traffic lights, grab your valuables and get away.

**Safety Tips While on Assignment!**

**When You Arrive**

* Register at your home country’s embassy—to facilitate your family contacting you in an emergency, for you to be evacuated in an emergency or for you to obtain a new passport should yours be lost or stolen. They will have current information on the security situation of the country in which you are serving. If you are ill or injured, the embassy can provide you with a list of medical facilities, or a consular officer can help you find assistance. The consul can help transfer funds from your home. They cannot get you out of jail, but they can assist you to get legal advice and visit you, advising you of your rights under local law and ensuring that you are held under humane conditions and treated fairly.
* Legal systems vary widely—take notice of laws related to driving or traffic violations. Ask your Receiving Organization supervisor about safety tips and local police customs as soon as you arrive.
* Use the address of your Receiving Organization, rather than the place where you live or your homeland address.

**Safety on the Street**

* Walking is a rewarding way to see a city but may be unsafe. It’s best to always go with a friend sticking to streets with lots of people, especially in the evenings.
* Use common sense. Be especially cautious in crowded subways, train stations, elevators, tourist sites, marketplaces, festivals, and marginal areas of cities.
* Don’t use short cuts, narrow alleys and poorly lit streets. Do not travel alone at night.
* Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances.
* If you feel you are being followed, slip into the nearest building where you see people.
* Keep a low profile. If you sense that others recognize you as a stranger, avoid eye contact.
* Avoid loud conversations or arguments.
* Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers.
* Beware of strangers who approach you, offering to be your guide or to give you bargains.
* Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will jostle you, ask you for directions or the time, or distract you by creating a disturbance. A child or even a woman carrying a baby can be a pickpocket. Groups of children may create a distraction while one child is picking your pocket.
* Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse snatchers.
* Try to appear purposeful when you move about. Even if lost, act as if you know where you are going. When possible, ask directions only from authorities.
* Know how to use a pay phone and have the proper change or token on hand.
* Learn a few phrases in the local language so you can ask for help in case you need to find the police or a doctor. Make a note of emergency telephone numbers: police, fire, your hotel (or the place where you are staying), your nearest embassy or consulate.
* If you are confronted, don’t fight back. Give up your valuables. Your money and passport can be replaced, but you cannot.

**How to Handle Money Safely**

Before leaving home, let your credit card company know you will be traveling so they know no one is using your card without authorization. Consider arranging to deposit money before you leave, which you can then withdraw with your card overseas. Alternatively, arrange for bank-to-bank transfers which may take a couple of weeks. Usually, credit cards can be used for emergency cash advances. Debit cards can be used at ATMs or banks. RFID wallets can be used to prevent credit card scan theft. Exchange a small amount of money into the foreign currency if possible, or preferably before leaving the immigration hall before you leave the airport.

* Find out what the exchange rate is prior to departure.
* Be sure to carry passport, credit/debits card and money in a money belt or pouch on your body.
* Divide your money between a waist pouch and an inside pocket or pouch.
* Keep credit/debit cards in separate places in case of loss or theft.
* Have various payment options in case of emergencies—checks, credit cards, cash. Don’t rely only on one form.
* Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Use credit cards when possible.
* Do not flash money when paying a bill. If using a credit card, make sure it is returned to you after each transaction.
* Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money or purchase souvenirs. Do not change money on the black market.
* If your possessions are lost or stolen, immediately report the loss to the police. Your ASV insurance includes a Personal Effects Floater (PEB), and you will need to complete a claim form to be reimbursed for your loss. To make a claim you will need to submit a copy of the police report. Report the loss of valuables, credit cards, airline tickets, and passport.

**How to Avoid Legal Difficulties**

When in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. You can be arrested for actions that you may consider minor infractions. Some of the offenses for which you can be arrested in certain places are:

* **Drug Violations.** Arrests have been made for possession of prescription drugs, particularly tranquilizers and amphetamines. If in doubt about foreign drug laws, ask appropriate authorities.
* **Possession of Firearms.** Sentences for possession of firearms in Mexico can be up to 30 years.
* **Photography.** In MANY countries, photographing such things as police and military installations, government buildings, border areas and transportation facilities is illegal. If in doubt, ask permission first.
* **Antiques.** Purchasing souvenirs that customs officials believe look like antiques can get you arrested. This is especially true in Turkey, Egypt, and Mexico. Document your purchases as reproductions or, if they are authentic, secure the necessary export permit.

**Protection Against Terrorism**

Terrorist acts occur at random and are unpredictable. The best protection is to avoid travel to unsafe areas with a persistent record of terrorist attacks or kidnapping. Terrorists look for defenseless, easily accessible targets who follow predictable patterns. The following pointers may help you avoid becoming a target of opportunity.

* Schedule direct flights if possible and avoid stops in high-risk airports or areas.
* Be aware of what you discuss with strangers or what may be overheard by others.
* Minimize time spent in the public area of an airport. Move quickly from the check-in counter to secure areas. On arrival, leave the airport as soon as possible.
* Avoid luggage tags, dress and behavior which identify you as a foreigner. For example, choose luggage tags which have a cover for your name and contact information.
* Keep an eye out for suspicious abandoned packages or briefcases. Report them to security and leave the area promptly.
* Avoid obvious terrorist targets such as places where foreigners are known to congregate.

If you must travel in an area where there has been a history of terrorist attacks or kidnappings:

* Discuss with your family what they should do in an emergency. Make sure your affairs are in order before you leave home.
* Register with your embassy or consulate upon arrival.
* Be friendly but cautious about discussing personal matters, your itinerary or where you’re from.
* Don’t leave personal papers in your hotel room. Keep them in the hotel safe.
* Watch for people following you or “loiterers” observing your comings and goings.
* Keep a mental note of safe havens, such as police stations, hotels, and hospitals.
* Let someone else know what your travel plans are. Keep them informed of changes.
* Avoid predictable times and routes of travel. Report suspicious activity to local police and the nearest embassy or consulate.
* Select your own taxi cabs at random. Don’t take a vehicle not clearly identified as a taxi. Compare the face of the driver with the one posted on his or her license.
* Travel with others if possible.
* Be sure of the identity of visitors before opening the door of your hotel room. Don’t meet strangers at unknown or remote locations.
* Refuse unexpected packages.
* Formulate a plan of action in case a bomb explodes, or gunfire is nearby.
* Check for loose wires or other suspicious activity around your car.
* Be sure your vehicle is in good operating condition in case you need to do high-speed or evasive driving.
* If you are in a situation where someone starts shooting, drop to the floor or get down as low as possible. Don’t move until you know the danger has passed. Do not attempt to help rescuers and do not pick up a weapon. Shield yourself behind or under a solid object if possible. If you need to move, crawl on your stomach.

**Hijacking/Hostage Situations**

Normally, the most dangerous phases of a hijacking or hostage situation are the beginning and, if there is a rescue attempt, the end. At the outset, terrorists are typically tense, high-strung and may behave irrationally. You must be calm and alert.

* Pray.
* Avoid resistance and sudden or threatening movements.
* Try to relax. Breathe deeply. Prepare mentally, physically, and emotionally for a possible long ordeal.
* Try to remain inconspicuous. Avoid direct eye contact and the appearance of observing your captors’ actions.
* Consume little food and drink.
* Consciously put yourself in a mode of passive cooperation. Talk normally. Do not complain. Avoid belligerency and comply with all orders.
* If questioned, keep your answers short. Don’t volunteer information or make unnecessary overtures.
* Maintain a sense of personal dignity and gradually increase your requests for personal comforts. Make requests in a reasonable, low-key manner.
* Establish a daily program of mental activity. Don’t be afraid to ask for anything you want or need—medicine, books, pencils, paper, etc.
* Eat what they give you, even if it doesn’t look or taste appetizing. A loss of appetite and weight is normal.
* Think positively. Avoid a sense of despair. Rely on your inner resources. Remember that you are a valuable commodity to your captors. It is important to them to keep you alive and well.