Getting Ready

1. Overview

We’re so glad you’ve chosen to be a volunteer! Once you’ve received confirmation from your Sending Division Volunteer Coordinator that your assignment has been voted by the General Conference (GC) Mission Personnel Processing Committee (MPPC), and your Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS) Database (DB) Home Page indicates your status is “Assignment Voted” you’re ready to embark upon your journey—well almost!

The purpose of this document is to make suggestions in planning for your assignment before you leave. There are two other documents “Being There,” which has helpful information for while you are in your country of service and “Returning Home” which is for when you return home. There are links to them on your AVS Home Page.

Because there is so much to do when preparing for your assignment, consider creating a Check List so not to forget anything. Following are suggestions in preparing for service. As you think of things, please keep adding to your list.

1. Obtaining a Passport

If you don’t have a passport, start the application process early. For some countries, the application process takes time. Purchase extra passport photos for visas and emergencies to take with you but not kept with your passport.

Many countries do not allow entry unless your passport is valid for at least six months after your planned date of return. Check the requirements for your country of service and renew your passport if needed.

If you lose your passport, report the loss immediately to the Embassy/Consulate office. For situations like this, make a photocopy of your passport to keep with the extra photos!

1. Obtaining a Visa

Check the Service Request (SR), Receiving Division Coordinator, Supervisor and/or Embassy/Consulate office to see what type of visa, documents and/or photos are required to enter your country of service and if passing through any countries on the way if a transit visa is needed. If required to go to an interview, ask your Receiving Division Coordinator or Supervisor what information you should be prepared to offer as well as what information you should keep to yourself. Visa application fees can be expensive, and, for some countries, if the visa is denied, chances are they will not issue one no matter how many times you re-apply.

Once received, check to see how long the visa is valid. You may need to reapply for one or more extensions before your time of service is complete. Sometimes leaving and re-entering the country is necessary in order to obtain an extension. Ask the Receiving Organization and/or Supervisor if they will assist with visa extensions and ask for the approximate costs so you know how to plan.

In most cases visas need to be applied for and obtained before departing. In a few instances visas are obtained upon arrival. If possible, obtain the visa before purchasing airline tickets so you don’t pay for your ticket only to find out later it can’t be changed!

1. Immunizations

Check the SR, Division Volunteer Coordinator, Supervisor, Embassy/Consulate office or the following web page <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/contentVaccinations.aspx> for the required immunizations needed for the country where you will be serving. Some immunizations need to be administered weeks before leaving. Be sure your booster shots (i.e., tetanus) are up to date.

It’s a good idea to make sure all immunizations are authenticated by an official stamp in the “International Certificate of Vaccinations” booklet as it is sometimes requested at international borders. Keep it with you when you travel. To obtain one, go to World Health Organization at <http://www.who.int>.

1. Travel Arrangements

Once you receive confirmation from your Sending Division Volunteer Coordinator your assignment has been voted by the MPPC, make your travel arrangements. Upload your itinerary to your AVS Home Page by using the “Enter Travel Itinerary” button and/or send it to your Sending Division Coordinator to upload it. This is needed to apply for your Accident & Sickness Prevention for Volunteers/Personal Effects Baggage (ASV/PEB) insurance.

Tips for planning your itinerary:

* Check with your Receiving Division Volunteer Coordinator and/or Supervisor to plan your arrival.
* Consider arriving during business hours and avoid national holidays.
* Obtain the contact information of the person scheduled to pick you up and make sure they have yours in case there is a delay or emergency.
* Make two copies of the information pages of your passport, credit cards, medications, visa and birth certificate or other proof of citizenship. Keep one set with you in a separate place from your passport while traveling. The other set leave with the emergency contact person listed on your AVS Online Application.
* Be aware of relevant news concerning the stability and safety of the country where you will be serving. Check with your Receiving Division Volunteer Coordinator and/or Supervisor for any concerns you may have.

Jet lag affects almost everyone crossing more than three time zones. The following tips can help minimize the effects:

* Set your watch to the destination time when boarding the plane and act according to the new time.
* Avoid heavy meals.
* Increase fluid intake (water and juice) to counter dehydration.
* Rest for the first few days after arrival in your host country.
1. Financial Planning

Financial planning is important, especially for international travel. Consider using the worksheet below.

* Finalize financial responsibilities before leaving home. If possible, pay off any debts or decide to either pay them yourself while serving, or for a family member or someone you trust to pay them in your absence.
* Prepare a financial plan that covers the date of your departure to the date you return home. (See Fundraising section.)
* Make an itemized list of ALL costs, however insignificant. Check the web, travel guides and brochures for helpful information. Check the SR and feel free to ask the Receiving Organization and/or Supervisor any questions.
* Add an additional 10% to your budget for unexpected costs or changes.

Financial Plan Worksheet

Select items which apply to your situation. Not all items listed are relevant to every position.

**Travel Documents:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Passport

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Visa

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Photos for Passport/Visa

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Travel to Embassy

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Courier costs

(While serving, you may need to leave the country to renew your visa.)

**Health:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Immunizations/Vaccinations

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Travel to clinics

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Extra supply of medications

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Extra glasses/contacts

**Incidentals:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Water purifier/Tincture of Iodine

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ First Aid Kit

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Mosquito net

**Departure from home:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Round-trip ticket

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Travel to say good-bye to family

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Travel to the airport

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Layover hotels, meals, travel costs

**Arrival at country of service:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Porter and luggage at airport

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Taxi to hotel

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Hotel costs

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Travel to destination

**Settling in:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Taxi to the nearest bank

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Rent/Deposit for accommodation

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Purchase of household goods

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Food

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Clothing/Bedding

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Internet Service

**In-country Expenses:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Bus/train/entry fees for sight seeing

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Social outings, food, and drinks

**Miscellaneous:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Postage/Stationery

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Pre-paid phone card/Sim Card

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Photocopying

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Souvenirs

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Computer repairs

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Interpreter

**Travel to your home country:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Documentation from necessary authorities

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Travel to city of departure

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Overnight hotel expenses

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Travel from hotel to airport

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Airport tax if applicable

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Layover hotels, meals, travel costs

**Arrival home:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Hotel, meals, travel costs

TOTAL $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Click here to

Fundraising

The following fundraising ideas may be helpful:

* Write a fundraising letter stating who you are, where you’re going, and some interesting facts about your assignment, etc. Use it to approach friends, family, and organizations for funds. Deliver it in person and include a budget showing how the funds will be spent. If sending it by mail, include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for replies. If you’re a college or university student, include your department chair, dean, chaplains, and campus clubs. Be sure to thank everyone who gave.
* Give a special presentation at church.
* Organize a charity concert featuring a choir, or an individual and charge admission.
* Plan an evening event with speakers, family films, plays and charge admission.
* Organize or take part in a run/bike/walk-a-thon. Solicit pledges per mile/km, or a lump sum.
* Use an online funding platform and/or social media such as Facebook, Twitter etc.
* Hold a sale or recycle to earn money.
* Collect spare change.

Sample Fundraising Letter

Dear Friends and Family:

I am writing to you today because I have decided to take some time off to participate in the Adventist Volunteer Service program. I would like to volunteer as an ESL Teacher in Costa Rica. However, I need to raise $\_\_\_ for my entire time of service. This amount includes travel costs, visa cost and living expenses.

I would like to be an Adventist Volunteer because I want to share the Gospel with people and help them grow spiritually, mentally, and physically. I got so excited about the possibility to help others that I stepped out in faith and applied for volunteer service before I had even raised the money for an assignment.

Because I’m donating a year of my life in service to others in a foreign country, most receiving organizations will be willing to provide me with room and board, a small stipend to cover the cost of necessities, local transportation, and the overall expenses of running the program.

I am planning to raise the $\_\_\_ I need in many ways, such as ….

The rest I am raising through the generosity of friends and relatives like you. Will you give as generous a gift as you possibly can?

Whatever the amount you share, large or small, will be sincerely appreciated. It will help me to turn my dream of volunteering into packed suitcases, tearful farewells, the roar of jet engines and the satisfaction that comes from hearing, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.

Please send your gift to me at….

My year as a volunteer will be very exciting, I am sure. I am asking for your prayers to help me face many challenges—living away from family and friends, adjusting to a new culture, and, above all, being an ambassador for Christ.

Please remember me in prayer as I apply for a position.

May God bless us both as we endeavor to carry out His service.

Thank you so very much for your help!

In His Service,

1. Country Information

Learn all you can about the country you are going to, the Receiving Organization, geography, people, and language. Be sure to ask your supervisor about materials, textbooks, classroom materials, evangelism tools, literature, crafts, etc. that might be useful.

Following are several links to research:

Wikipedia, almanacs, and magazines such as *National Geographic* for further information about the country where you will be serving*.* For Adventist reference materials, check the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, the *SDA Yearbook*, or the *Institute of World Mission*.

Currency and Foreign Exchange: Use the currency converter as an easy way to find out what your money is worth abroad. <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>.

Helpful questions of interest:

What is the population?

What are the demographics? \_\_\_% under 18 years; \_\_\_% of women; \_\_\_% in urban areas

What are the languages spoken?

What are the people groups?

How are the socials groups of society organized?

What are appropriate customs/relations between sexes?

What is the position of women in society?

What is the educational level? For men? For women?

What and when are the national holidays and/or major festivals?

What are the transportation methods?

What are the health and living conditions?

What are the major health risks in the country?

What about the quality of medical services and hospitals?

What is commonly eaten? How is it eaten? And when?

What are eating and drinking precautions?

What immunizations are required or recommended?

What is the history of the country?

Who are the country’s traditional friends? Its traditional/national enemies?

Was the country once a colony? Of what country?

What are the dates and the circumstances of the country’s independence?

What is the country’s involvement in recent or current conflicts and/or resolution?

What are the common customs? Forms of greeting and farewell? Gestures to avoid? Serious taboos?

What are the local religions?

How do people worship and why?

What is the history of Christianity in this country? When was it introduced and why?

What Christian churches are successful in this country? Why?

What is the history of the Adventist Church? Who has generally accepted it and why?

Since you are subject to the laws of the countries you visit and serve, learn about laws and customs before you go. Check the library, travel agent, embassies, consulates, or tourist bureaus. Keep track of what is reported in the media about recent developments in those countries.

It’s helpful to know a few common expressions in the local language.

Hello

Goodbye

Thank you

Please

My name is…

How do you say…?

Where is the toilet?

How do I get to…?

How are you?

1. Insurance

The GC Working Policy (GC WP) requires volunteers to be covered by ASV/PEB accident and sickness insurance. After you have been voted by the MPPC, the Sending Division is responsible to apply for the insurance and to send you an identification card. Once applied for, your AVS online application status will then be “Departure Arranged,” “In-Service,” or “Extended.” Please find a copy of the summary at the end of this document.

**Costs:**

* The Receiving Organization usually pays for the insurance premium and current $150.00 deductible, unless otherwise indicated on the “Financial Benefits” section of your SR.
* The Receiving Organization usually pays for doctor’s visit up front. They can be reimbursed for visits by filing a claim with Adventist Risk Management (ARM) if the bill, or a combination of bills, is over $150.00. If you are responsible for paying the premium, then you will need to pay for the doctor’s visit up front and then file a claim if the bill, or a combination of bills, is over $150.00.

**Claims:**

* To make a claim for an accident or illness, no matter how minor, you must see a LOCAL doctor and have the visit documented BEFORE returning home for further treatment. Claims will be denied if you are not able to provide proof you saw a LOCAL doctor and you or the Receiving Organization has paid the deductible. Save ALL receipts—even for visits costing under $150.00 (even if in another language). To print the claim form, go to <http://www.adventistrisk.org>, click “File Your Insurance Claim Here,” then “ACE Accident & Sickness Medical.”
* Keep a list of the model/serial numbers and receipts of items you take with you such as a laptop or camera. If items are lost, stolen or damaged, to file a claim, you will need a list of the model/serial numbers and receipts of the items as well as a police report if they are stolen. To print the “Personal Effects Baggage claim form, go to <http://www.adventistrisk.org>, click “File Your Insurance Claim Here,” then under Short Term Travel “Personal effects & Money.”
1. Health Tips

The availability and quality of medical care varies worldwide. Health facilities may be poor and medical supplies and skilled practitioners may be scarce. With the emergence of new epidemics, it is vital to remain healthy, avoid accidents and minimize the need for medical care.

For a healthy experience, use common sense, have a positive attitude, have a knowledge of the health risks, get the appropriate immunizations, and take reasonable precautions.

Consider the recommendations below before you leave home:

* Get a physical exam to identify and follow-up any medical problems. Have your doctor complete the Health Form for your AVS online application.
* Get a dental check up and be sure you are up to date, including dentures and bridges.
* Get your eyes tested and update prescriptions for glasses and contacts if needed. Take an extra pair of glasses and/or multiple pairs of contacts, along with a copy of your prescription. Prescription sunglasses may be useful.
* Ask the Receiving Division Volunteer Coordinator and/or Supervisor about the availability of supplies such as contact solutions or prescription medications for allergies etc. If needed, take a supply with you to last until your service is over. Keep copies of your prescription(s) with the generic name of the drug(s) along with the copy of your passport, etc. Keep medications in your carry-on luggage in case your checked bags are lost in transit. Depending on the medication, you may have to ask the airline’s permission to take it in your carry-on luggage.
* Make appointments for and obtain any needed immunizations.
* If you require a special diet or certain foods, research what foods are most eaten and available in the country where you are going to serve.
* In some countries, it is best NOT to receive any injections or blood transfusions. Consider bringing your own syringes.
* Prepare a First-Aid Kit especially if serving in a remote area with limited medical facilities.

**First-Aid Kit:**

* Ace bandages
* Aloe Vera or anything with Benzocaine (for sunburn)
* Antiseptic ointment such as Neosporin
* Antibiotics (although expensive, Cipro is preferred because it covers the major dysentery pathogens, except amoebas, it preserves the “good guys” in the intestines, it is not sun sensitive like most antibiotics and has few side effects)
* Aspirin/Tylenol
* Band aids
* Bandages—telfa pads and tape
* Benadryl
* Cling tape
* Cotton balls
* Female hygiene items
* Hydrogen peroxide or betadine (for sterilizing/cleaning)
* Insect repellant
* Motrin or Advil (inflammation and pain)
* Needles (to clean out dirt and sand that gets scraped under skin)
* Pepto Bismal (for first stages of intestinal issues)
* Polysporin (fights infection)
* Saline solution (for eye wash)
* Sore throat lozenges
* Steri-strips
* Sunscreen (minimum SPF 15; SPF 30-45 is preferred)
* Cold, anti-itch, pain, headache, stomach, allergy medications
1. Safety Begins When You Pack

**What to Take**

* Avoid the appearance of affluence. A flashy or too-casual wardrobe can mark you as a tourist and a target. Check the SR for the “Acceptable and Unacceptable Dress” requirements.
* Always keep your luggage with you, never leave it unattended or with a stranger.
* If you wear glasses/contacts, pack an extra pair in your carry-on luggage.
* When traveling, keep all valuables with you or in your carry-on luggage.
* Keep medicines in original, labeled containers in your carry-on luggage. Carry a list of your prescriptions and generic names. If a medicine is unusual or contains narcotics, carry a doctor’s letter stating your need for the drug. If you question the legality of a certain drug, consult the airline, embassy, or consulate.
* Use major credit cards. Carry very little cash and do not flash it.
* Separate money and documents in more than one place rather than all in one wallet or pouch. One of the safest places is a pouch or money belt worn under your clothing. Inside pockets or a crossbody are good. Avoid handbags, fanny packs and outside pockets.
* Pack extra passport photos and a copy of the passport information page and visa to speed the replacement of a lost or stolen passport.
* Put your name, address and contact information inside and outside each piece of luggage and carry-on. Use covered luggage tags to avoid casual observation of your identity.
* Consider using a pre-paid phone or SIM card for your overseas location. Make sure to know the access numbers.

**What to Leave Behind**

* Make two copies of your passport identification page, driver’s license, and the credit cards you plan to take–one set for the emergency contact person listed on your AVS Online Application and the other set carry with you away from your valuables.
* Leave irreplaceable family objects, unnecessary credit cards and jewelry at home.

**What to Arrange Before You Go**

* **Accommodations—**If your itinerary requires you stay in a hotel while traveling to your destination, choose a hotel with security. Safety experts recommend booking a room from the 2nd to the 7th floors—above ground level to deter easy entrance from outside, but low enough for fire equipment to reach.
* **Legal Documents—**Have your affairs at home in order. Leave a current Last Will, insurance documents, and power of attorney with your emergency contact person from your AVS Online Application.
* **Credit Cards—**To use credit cards overseas, call and let them know where you are going and for how long, so they won’t cancel your card. Know the credit limit so you don’t charge over that amount. People have been arrested for innocently exceeding their credit limit. Know the overseas credit card phone number to report any loss.
* **Insurance—**ASV insurance includes a PEB policy which covers up to US $3,000 for loss or theft abroad. Before leaving, check your Volunteer Home Page, Sending Division Volunteer Coordinator and/or Supervisor to be sure the ASV insurance has been requested for you. Make sure to always carry the insurance card with you.

Seek the support of family and friends in prayer, ask them to write.

Believe God has called you and determine to follow through on your commitment to serve Him cheerfully and willingly despite the challenges you WILL meet and to complete your assignment.

Above all, please study daily God’s word and pray for wisdom. Know why you are a Seventh-day Adventist and why you want to serve God as an Adventist volunteer.