

## **Trip Preparation**

Lecturers: Amy Smith, Kurt Kornbluth

This class session is an informal discussion of travel details (no slides).

Topics include:

- Words of wisdom for traveling
- Taking field notes
- Packing Lists

## ***Travel Tips***

Handout: *Travel Tips*

What should you expect at your project site? It's hard to predict. Don't be surprised by lack of electricity. Internet access is still very hard to find, and if you do find an Internet café, you may wait hours only to find that you can't get online.

Latrines may be smelly, filled with bugs and insects. Feel free to ask a bug-tolerant buddy to go in first if you're bothered by bugs. Do NOT assume toilet paper is available; you may not even be able to buy it locally, so it's wise to bring some along (or tissues); or, just inquire as to local custom. Often you should dispose waste paper in a bucket next to the toilet, don't flush it.

## **Health Concerns**

Safe drinking water: Chances are, you'll get sick...not seriously sick, but probably will get diarrhea. Kurt learned to occasionally reject the food/drink from hosts if he has any concern about it. Amy always carries a water filter. In Honduras last year, they had big bottles of "safe" water that weren't always safe. Tea and coffee can be considered safe because water is boiled, but be careful of milk. Beware of ice cubes, they're probably made with unsafe water. If you do get diarrhea, make sure you don't get dehydrated (Gatorade mix is a good thing to have on hand).

Fruits and vegetables are probably best to avoid if not cooked or carefully peeled.

If you're prone to getting really hungry, you may want to keep a stock of comfortable snacks with you (energy bars, tabouleh mix, peanut butter) to fall back on.

Bring some alcohol-based hand sanitizer rub, and use it.

In case you get sick, you may want to have:

- Pepto-Bismol®
- Immodium® (but ask doctor, it may inhibit body's healing process)

Bring anything you might want for your own special needs. Bring a double supply of all medicines, split between two places in your luggage. If you're prone to sprains, bring elastic bandages; allergic reactions to bee stings or foods, bring Epi-pens. Don't forget spare glasses or contact lenses.

Make sure you pack all the important stuff in hand luggage; expect 10-20% chance of lost luggage.

Immunizations: don't delay getting this started – some shots must be taken some time prior to traveling. For instance, malaria medications must be started 1 week before departure. Be sure you bring your immunization certificates with you (especially for yellow fever).

### **Social Interactions**

Simply because you're coming from the U.S., you'll be perceived as wealthy. This will affect many aspects of your trip, so be prepared.

You'll be asked for money, repeatedly. Decide in advance what your response will be – how to take compassionate actions without encouraging non-stop begging? Amy found that even after living in a village for four years, people still asked her for money. Kurt finds that folks "figure you out" after a couple of days.

Be careful about how you present your possessions (or not). Carrying expensive stuff around will change people's perceptions – allow yourself to travel with nothing.

Thefts happen.

- Kurt's experience: 9 years traveling, no robberies yet; he brings a laptop and a digital camera on trip to Zambia. Their local contact assures Kurt that the hotel is "safe." They went to an Internet café, showing pictures on the laptop to folks, not being the least bit wary. Next day, somebody staked out their hotel room, cleared out the room while they were out. Key points: (1) don't show off your stuff when you're in public; (2) if it's something you really cannot lose, keep it with you at all times.
- Don't carry your camera in the open around your neck, it will attract thieves. While it might be inconvenient, stow in out of sight in your backpack.
- If you carry digital camera, store filled-up memory cards someplace away from the camera.
- If something is stolen, should you go to the police? It won't help you get it back, but go if (a) you want the interesting experience or (b) you plan to file an insurance claim, for which you'll need the police report.
- If it's something you can't bear to lose, then don't bring it.

If you like to keep journals and write letters, consider bringing some carbon paper to keep a duplicate record in your book. You'll love to look back on it years later.

People will be interested in you. Bring a small photo album showing family, where you live, hobbies, etc.

People will tend to be very generous toward you. Check with your trip leader about appropriate gifts for hosts and co-workers, as well as possible contacts with government folks. Also, little presents for kids – but be careful about giving lots of stuff too early in your visit.

Dress will be viewed as your expression of respect, especially in first meeting. Bring at least one nice set of clothes. In particular, you should probably not wear shorts in public. Short-sleeved loose cotton shirts are good; jeans are too informal for meetings, so bring a skirt or khakis.

Q: What should we expect about washing clothes?

A: Watch and inquire. You may be able to hire somebody to do your laundry for you; a host may volunteer to “do it for you” -- but know that some woman somewhere will be doing it, seek her out and thank her; or do it yourself.

Q: How best to manage people’s offers of generosity, where you don’t feel comfortable accepting? For instance, if you don’t trust the food to be safe?

A: First, check with the trip leader and hosts. If you’re offered something that’s simply making you uncomfortable, i.e. being offered honored bits of meat that makes you queasy, you can plead being a vegetarian -- but then beware of being seen eating other meats later. Maybe it’s best to take a small sample and say thank you.

A story: on her first visit to Botswana, Amy was being brought larger and larger plates of food. She was struggling trying to finish each successively larger plate, assuming that was expected and polite. After several days, she learned that kids ate only the leftovers once the honored guest was finished – she did not need to eat everything!

Be aware of which hand(s) are used for accepting food, receiving change, how to point, which hand gestures might be interpreted as profane or confrontational.

Seek out ways to connect folks through sports and other activities. A group called the “Hash House Harriers” holds distance running events in the capitals of nearly every country. Go to church if you’re a church-goer. Bring your favorite ball or musical instrument.

Be wary of borrowing (local partner) people’s phones and computers. This stuff can be incredibly expensive. Get a phone card if available. Try not to use anybody else’s resource during precious working hours. And if you do need to use it, offer to pay them cash. Your hosts may feel they want to offer these things; if so, be gracious and judicious in your response.

Be sensitive about taking pictures of people or situations that don’t want to be photographed. Ask if you’re not sure. And by all means do them respect of abiding by their wishes. Sometimes you may be asked to pay, decide whether it’s worth it.

## **Managing the Field Work Experience**

Be thoroughly prepared, thinking through how you'd like to spend your time. And then be ready to modify all your plans on a moment's notice, as it's likely that very little will occur as you expect.

You'll be impressed by local manufacturing skills. Check with your trip leader about what materials you really need to bring vs. what's locally available.

You'll probably want to make promises about following up with the people you've met and worked with. Be careful about over-committing what follow-up you'll actually be able to do upon your return to MIT. Will you be able to print and send copies of all those pictures? If so, that's great!

## ***Field Notes***

Handout: *Design Challenge Worksheet*

You will notice things that could become great projects in your field work. Bring a stack of these sheets with you. Document these ideas with as much data as possible while you're in the field. Community need, stakeholder analysis, scope of project....

These sheets often form the basis of projects others do in future years. Write them keeping other readers in mind.

Do as much data collection and research as possible. Once back at MIT, you don't want to be saying "If only I'd asked that question!!!"

Take notes about each picture you take. Why did you take it, what does it show? Have some way to gauge the scale of things.

## ***Packing List***

Handout: *Packing List*

This is a generic list – some things will not be appropriate for every country. I.e don't bring heavy hiking boots to India. Don't worry about wearing shorts in Brazil. Go over it with your trip leader beforehand.