

D-LAB: *ENERGY*

Working and traveling in a developing country is very different from what you might be used to, so here are a few suggestions to keep in mind. If, after reading this and the travel advisories, you have concerns, please let the course staff know right away.

Some things you should know about traveling in developing countries:

- You probably will not have many of the luxuries that you are used to here, such as:
 - electricity
 - internet access (there may be internet cafes in some of the bigger towns, but the connections can be slow and unreliable)
 - indoor plumbing (yes, this means toilets-- it could range from anything from a small shack with a hole in the ground to a well-maintained out house. There may or may not be toilet paper available-- I always carry a travel pack of tissues with me, just in case!)
 - safe drinking water (if in doubt, assume that that the water has not been treated. Each team will have a filter to treat water; you may prefer to bring your own iodine tablets).
- You are very likely to get sick if you are not very careful about what you eat and drink. Ice cubes made from unsafe water are a risk-- freezing does not kill all the bacteria. Fresh fruits and vegetables may have been washed with contaminated water, so it is safer to eat food that has been well cooked or can be peeled. (unfortunately, even if you are careful, you still might get sick. I always take acidopholus/probiotic pills from trader joes (or a CVS type store) daily, then Pepto Bismol tablets if I start to feel funky, then Immodium if things get out of control, and only take Cipro if you're lying on your bed with awful cramps.
- Even basic first-aid needs may not be available where you are, so your trip leader will have a first-aid kit for the team. If you have a prescription that is important for you to take on a regular basis, bring two sets and keep them in separate places in case anything gets stolen or damaged. If you have contact lenses or glasses, you might want to bring an extra set of these along as well.
- You will be considered to be a very wealthy person, think carefully about the way that you present yourself and what you choose to bring with you. Don't carry expensive things in plain view, it could make you a target for robbery. Do not bring anything with you that you would be heart-broken if it were stolen or that could make you and your travel companions a mugging target. Wear as little jewelry as possible, and only bring obviously inexpensive, subtle things. For example, I have a wooden wedding ring that I wear when I travel and leave the gold one at home; I don't wear any other jewelry when working in the field. A brass rat should not be worn or brought on this trip. Similarly, a small point and shoot camera is fine, but do not bring a DSLR or similar large camera. You should also bring an unassuming bag to carry your camera in whenever you're not using it.
- People will be interested in you and your life. You might want to bring a small photo album with pictures of your family, where you live, things you like to do, etc.

- People will be more generous and helpful than you expect, so bring some small gifts with you to give to those people who were especially helpful. When staying with a family in a village, it is courteous to provide a gift to your hosts.
- People will ask you for money (all the time!!), you should think carefully about what your policy is before you go. We discourage hand-outs.
- Regardless of how comfortable you begin to feel, you are a stranger and should be very careful about traveling in places where you are not well-known. Don't go out alone at night.
- In general, rural areas in developing countries are more conservative about dress than you are used to. Shorts are rarely worn (except when playing sports).
- There may be times when you will be meeting with important people in the village, and the way that you dress for these meetings will be considered to be a measure of your respect. You should bring a nice outfit-- for men, a collared shirt and khakis will be fine; for women, a dress or skirt.

Some thoughts on doing field work in developing countries:

- Make a plan of the work that you hope to carry out including a list of all the materials you will need to do so. If you are collecting large amounts of data, you make up worksheets before you go so that you can fill them in as you go and save time.
- Very little will go the way you expect, be sure to be flexible in the work that you do. It's always a good idea to have a back up plan (or two or three!) before you go.
- Do not underestimate the skill of local craftsman. You have a very different set of skills than they do; be sure that you respect their views and consider their input, but you should also have confidence in your own abilities.
- Do not overestimate the materials and tools that will be available. If there are any components that are critical for your work, bring them with you (and bring spares).
- Be careful about what you say you can deliver. It is not fair to raise the expectations of the people you are working with if you can't follow through!

Some final thoughts

- Whether you like it or not, you will be representing more than you might think (MIT, the US, volunteers, etc.) and you should behave in an appropriate manner.
- We will make the trip as safe as possible, but there are always risks when traveling. If at any time you find yourself in a situation that makes you uncomfortable, follow your instincts to stay safe.

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