

Etiquette and Advice for International Travel

Alcohol: We are a service/immersion trip trying to live for in solidarity with the poor. We are here to learn and serve and this should be what is foremost in your mind. Our covenant reads, "I will never drink alcoholic beverages. I understand that this is a service trip not a vacation. We are here to learn and serve." We would like to maintain the spirit of this rule for the entire trip. While on-site, there will be no alcohol consumption. At times, we will leave our site in order to tour/relax. Our expectation is that if students of age want to drink, they can enjoy one or two drinks in the presence of our adult leaders during special occasion mealtimes. The drinks come at your own expense. This provision in our rule allows team members to relax and celebrate while maintaining a safe environment. However, such special mealtimes should only happen one or two times on your entire trip. In other words, alcohol consumption will only play a negligible role in your entire experience. You will be held accountable to preserving the spirit of this rule.

Attitude: Stay positive! You will surely at times be tired, uncomfortable, homesick and just generally low on your trip. However, we ask that you try to bring your A-game to all of our interactions and adventures together. Keeping a positive attitude despite feeling low will greatly impact what you gain from this experience. Furthermore, here is advice from former leaders on how to get the most out of your time abroad:

- **Talk to people.** The more you converse, the more you know, and the deeper the bond you forge. Ask your hosts about the local area. Sit down with the nuns or priests and talk to them about their experiences. Listen to the people you come into contact with and ask questions. There are whole worlds to be discovered simply by asking people about their lives. Be friendly, open, and willing to learn.
- **Don't close your eyes to what you see.** Be vulnerable! While abroad, you might experience a number of difficult situations: extreme poverty, hunger, beggars, poor housing, stories of oppression. As hard as these things will be to see, hear, and feel, it is important to allow yourself the vulnerability to experience all of it for what it is and contemplate the larger social justice questions that stand behind these realities. But vulnerability also applies to your teammates and the people we will be interacting with. Be honest, open and gentle with each other. Try to reach out and forge real relationships with others.
- **Be adventurous.** You will be exposed to a lot of foreign customs and strange looking foods. Why not join in! These gestures go a long way in relating to the local people and indicate a willingness to check Western attitudes and habits at the door.

Bathrooms: It is a good idea to **carry in your pockets at all times small tissues for when you cannot find toilet paper and hand sanitizer for when there is no sink.** In some countries you cannot flush toilet paper. You need to throw it in the trash. In other countries they don't even use toilet paper in some bathrooms! Sometimes showers only have room temperature water. Never anticipate there being soap.

Cash: Always lock up your extra money in the safe wherever you are staying!!! Virtually all expenses are covered on the trip. You will only need money for snacks, souvenirs, postcards and stamps, and tipping your driver (although we will always take care of this when we travel as a group). **You will probably not need more than \$100** unless you plan on buying a lot of crafts. Bring small bills/ATM card.

Clothes: Pack light and layer up! This holds true for every country we visit. Some places are tropical and you can expect sudden rain storms and lots of sweating in between. Others are high altitude and you can expect great fluctuations in temperature. Don't forget hat/sunblock and also a sweatshirt. Even more importantly, remember that you are in a foreign country with different ideas of what is appropriate and what is not. **Assume that you cannot wear shorts and tank tops while out in public.** Not only will bare shoulders and legs draw way too much attention to our team – it might even deny you access to certain places! It is best to default to the policy of clothing that covers more of you than less – for both men and women! People make a significant effort in the countries we are visiting to present themselves well and appreciate it when visitors do the same.

Customs: Do your homework and read up about the local customs of the country you will be visiting. For example, what language are people speaking in rural Jamaica? What is “cuy” on the menu in Ecuador? Why do Vaishnavite Hindus wear a U-shaped mark on their foreheads in India? These answers and more can usually be found by a simple on-line search. You're certainly not expected to know everything about your travel destination and there will be plenty of chances to ask questions while we're there, but it helps to have done some research beforehand.

Document Your Trip: Your trip will be over before you know it! Don't let this experience be locked in the past – but record it as you go so that you can come back to some of the emotions and insights you experienced.

- ❖ Start your **journal** before the trip, noting hopes and fears. Continue journaling during your time abroad, capturing your experiences and feelings. After your trip, take time to write about your transition back home.
- ❖ Capture your experience with **pictures**. (more on this later).
- ❖ Create a **blog or email list** and write about your experiences for your friends and family when you have access to a computer.

Drugs: We have a “**No Tolerance**” **drug policy**, meaning that if students are caught purchasing, selling or using drugs, they are sent home immediately at their own expense.

Entering/Exiting the Country: You will need your passport! When you are filling out your customs form, the purpose of your visit will always be “tourism.” You need to know the address where you are staying when you arrive. It should be on your Basic Info sheet.

Expect that:

- Not everything will start on time
- Listening to interpretation/translation will be tiring
- You will find little time and space for individual needs and privacy
- **You will receive more from the people you meet than you could ever give**

Gifts: You are encouraged to form relationships based on commonality rather than on handouts which form dependency on the beneficiary. However, if participants want to bring appropriate gifts for special people they meet which demonstrates their appreciation and are not too extravagant, try giving a family photo or a small knickknack with your city name on it. Do this at your discretion.

Holy Places: Show proper respect at holy places and follow all relevant protocol. Even if you are not truly “worshipping”, you will still be expected to attend different ceremonies out of respect for our hosts.

Language: If you are going to a country where they don't speak English, **you do not need to know the local language to participate.** Having little or no fluency will make the experience different for you than for group members who are able to communicate directly with the people. Some advantages to not knowing the language

- ✓ You may approach people with greater humility and awareness of dependence on them
- ✓ You will be forced to observe, listen, look speakers in the eye
- ✓ Your attempts to convey gratitude, empathy, and solidarity will be done at the most basic human level without dependence on eloquence

That being said, any attempt to learn a local language shows immense respect for the people we will be working with and are greatly appreciated. Simple words and phrases aren't that hard to memorize. Try your best and don't get too self-conscious.

Meals: Meals will be simple. Expect foods native to the country you are visiting, like rice and beans and tropical fruit in our Spanish-speaking sites, pastas and breads in Poland, curries in India and pasties in Jamaica. **Please try all of the new foods you can as a way to expose yourself to the culture and also to show respect for people who normally do not have easy access to food.** Let your leaders know if you are struggling with the food selections.

Picture Taking: Think before you snap. Two weeks is plenty of time to take pictures. We will be in exciting places that you will want to record with your camera. Tourist areas are one thing, but your camera should not be the first thing people see when meeting you or else you run the risk of objectifying the very people you have come to learn about and serve. After you have reached a work site please put your camera away for a few days. We are hoping to establish relationships based on solidarity while abroad and not having your camera flashing will allow you to focus on getting to know the people you are working with. Later on, you will then be taking pictures that capture a relationship and a memory together. As a general rule, always ask permission before you take someone's picture. And almost everyone would like copies of the photos that you take of them. Write down their names and information and send copies. If you tell someone that you will send a copy, please do!

Safety: Safety is our number one priority on this trip – but we need your help to make sure everyone stays safe! Some of the cities we will be in have a reputation for violence and you must be aware of the many levels at which violence affects the daily lives of the people we live around, especially the lives of the poor. Please follow these guidelines:

1. **Stay with the group at all times!** Be aware of where you are going and the people around you.
2. **Leave passports, plane tickets and extra cashed locked at the guest house.** Carry a copy of your passport with you at all times as well as your Basic Info Sheet that should have addresses where we will be at different points on the trip.
3. **Just in case, carry the card of the hostel you are staying in with you** (or write it down somewhere safe.) In the event that you get separated from the group, this will be handy to give to someone to help you find your way back.
4. **Do not wear conspicuous jewelry or watches.**
5. **In the unlikely event of a robbery, immediately hand over what is being asked.** Stay calm.

Sex: We are very clear that sexual behavior has no role on our trips. Besides breaking from our Catholic, Christian values, a sexual encounter between students alienates them from the rest of the team because their focus becomes one another. A sexual encounter with a citizen of the country we are visiting is not only alienating, but could have unforeseen legal consequences, could bar Canisius College from returning to this site, could cost the local person his or her job, etc. Students who are suspected of having sexual relations with others can potentially be sent home at their own expense.

Sickness: Feeling Sick? There will probably be at least one point during the trip when you feel not quite right. **If you think you might be sick, TELL A LEADER!** This includes even the embarrassing stuff like diarrhea. Don't worry – we've all been there! We want to keep you in tip top shape for the whole trip, so the sooner you tell us, the quicker we can make the necessary arrangements to get you better.

Technology: Our culture is very technology-dependent. This is both a way to connect with others and at the same time can often be something that isolates and alienates you from the actual moment you are in. **On these trips, we challenge you to practice simple living and try to shift the focus off technology and onto face-to-face relationships.** Most likely, you will not have a lot of access to phone and email services. However, **a general rule to follow is: we don't want to see your technology. Please use it sparingly and privately.** For example, you are free to bring an iPod, but listen to it an night in your room before bed to help you relax. If your cell phone has reception this does not mean that you should be using it the same way you would back home. Limit yourself and be mindful of how much time you are connecting with people at home and therefore not connecting with your teammates or the people in your country. Be mindful also that not everyone on your team can afford international calls like this. Don't let technology cause rifts. On the other hand, if you cannot shake feeling homesick and really need to connect with people at home, talk to your leaders about getting an exception to this policy.

Above all, if you want to have a great experience, practice PATIENCE, FLEXIBILITY and keep a LIGHT HEART!