

16. Responsible travel

When planning your travel it is important to consider its potential effects on local communities, the need to respect local customs and cultures and the sustainability and effect on the environment of the projects or activities you may be involved in.

Some countries may require a certain kind of dress (e.g. covering your head or not wearing revealing clothes) and adherence to particular manners, behaviour or customs when going about your daily life. You should read up on these before you go. Information can often be found in guidebooks and on the FCO individual country profiles at: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

You should always ask people's permission if you wish to take their photograph.

For further information on the ethical issues associated with your planned travel, or to find out more about how to travel responsibly and ethically, consult:

- www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- www.ethicalvolunteering.org
- www.stuffyourrucksack.com/

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- What are the ethical issues involved in travelling responsibly in my destination(s)? Consider:
 - the effect on local communities
 - respecting local customs and cultures
 - the impact on the environment
- What actions will I undertake to ensure I travel responsibly (e.g. using water purification treatment instead of buying lots of bottled water and therefore contributing to waste; not using a precious and perhaps unreliable water supply for long showers so the local people might go without; being responsible when disposing of general waste, sanitary waste and unwanted food)
- Apart from you, will anyone benefit from the activities you undertake whilst travelling?
- If participating in a project, will it continue after you have left?

Note on culture shock

The first few days or even weeks abroad can be a shock to the system, especially if you have never travelled independently before. Don't think there is something wrong with you! It is quite normal to feel that you want to go home and for things to feel great one moment and possibly awful the next. In a country which might have a very different climate or even local diet to the UK it is also quite common to feel physically unwell as your body takes time to adjust to new temperatures, humidity or food. To deal with these effects try to:

- Accept that your feelings are normal
- Learn as much about your surroundings as possible
- Respect the views and attitudes of local people
- Find out the cultural dos and don'ts - e.g. about dress, hospitality, religion, attitudes to the opposite sex, taking photos
- Not be critical
- Share your feelings
- Create a routine for eating well and exercising
- Set targets, taking each day or week at a time
- Find time for laughter and fun.