

SECTION 2:

PREPARING TO

WORK ABROAD

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Above all else, you must research your host country thoroughly before setting off so that you are able to safely practice your profession sensitively and effectively.

Personal expectations may be high when anticipating a trip abroad either for a short or long duration but what you can do may be over-estimated. Local needs may be very different from what you expect and therefore not all forward preparation may be successful. While professional knowledge is a valuable asset, the most important mind set is to be flexible and adaptable to local needs.

Don't jump straight in. Allow yourself plenty of time to learn about the country and the people you plan to work with. Many health and educational services in less-resourced or remote regions follow a Western model but this may actually be inadequate or inappropriate in local contexts. Try to focus on mutual learning and participation with your local colleagues where appropriate rather than attempt assessment of needs and interventions based on external models.

The following points will help you focus on some basics in your preparation:

Local structures

- **Talk to previous visitors** to gain information on the local area, previously identified needs, previous work carried out locally, resources available, and how things work. Members of ADAPT, CTI and OT Frontiers might be able to help you with this.
- Contact the national professional OT/PT/SLT association if there is one and become a member.
- **Find out who requested the post you are going to and why.** What do they imagine you will be doing, and what do they want the outcome to be?

- **Read up on the country's health policies, its health needs and priorities and its wider development strategy.** What are the recommendations of international bodies (e.g. WHO, UNICEF) for your clinical area/profession?
- **Learn about the country's healthcare and education systems and structures.** How well established are they? Where are the provisions? Who runs them? Who accesses them? Who does not access them? Does your profession exist? How is it viewed by others? What other professions exist locally and how does that affect your work? E.g. are there generic roles such as rehabilitation worker? It is important to understand how disability services are structured locally under ministry of health or social welfare, such as community based rehabilitation
- **Find out about the local services,** existing relationships between them (e.g. joint training/campaigning initiatives/referral pathways) and any useful contacts both within and outside the organisation you will be working with. This will enable you to take a broader approach and a number of differing ideas may emerge. This may lead to cross organisational links and facilitate referrals where appropriate and thereby strengthening existing local networks. .
- **Find out about professional requirements locally.** This will give you an initial idea of the standards you might expect. Which professions have protected title? What are the training, licensing and monitoring requirements if any? This varies enormously from one setting to another and between disciplines within the same country, so it's important to make no assumptions. You could find yourself working with individuals who are more highly qualified than you are, a teacher who did not complete secondary school, a social worker who is fully qualified after training for 3 months, or someone with the same job title as you but no formal training. Are there different levels of training within the same profession (e.g. diploma and degree holders)? Is there elitism and hierarchy? Often local people who do not have qualifications are, by virtue of experience, highly competent rehabilitation practitioners.
- **Be advised by local colleagues,** qualified and unqualified, about how to operate in this working environment which is unfamiliar to you. Get advice from local staff about:
 - who to approach for what.
 - what past overseas volunteers have done,

- what barriers to expect, e.g. the impossibility of travelling around Eid festivals
- beliefs about disability etc.
- previous experience of volunteers;
- etiquette and procedures, for example around referrals between services/consulting colleagues/working across different organisations;
- **Gain information about the people you will be working with**, with regard to their professional background and/or level of experience in your field. This will enable you to plan an appropriate level of training if that is what you are there to provide, or appropriate levels of collaboration and discussion if you are there to help with service provision
- **Try to gain some understanding of your organisation** – the internal structures and hierarchies; knowing this in advance will make your work easier. If you start to learn about this on arrival, don't be too quick to judge what you hear, see and are told. Sometimes the real situation takes a while to emerge!
- **Be sensitive to local hierarchies**: these can be very important and they may be different from the ones you are familiar with at home.
- **How are 'volunteers' regarded locally?** The idea of a "volunteer" is not easily understood everywhere and the experience of volunteers is not always a happy one. Here are some illustrative and cautionary quotations about volunteers from members of South African communities:

- **"It's OK if they want to come, but I don't know why they are here."**
- **"They are building buildings while our children are dying."**
- **"They are here to help us? I thought they were here to learn."**
- **"Yes, we want them to come again ... but because they bring money!"**

Cited by Erik Nelson in *Listening to Community Voices in International Service*, available at <http://globalsl.org/2014/01/27/listening-community-voices-isl/>

may increase credibility of local services but will that remain when you leave? Equally,

your presence may create tensions. Alternatively, being a “naïve” outsider may allow you to effect change that a local person would not have the confidence to approach – but try to consider any negative effects this may have

- **Identify your client group** as much as possible before setting off and skill up in any unfamiliar skill/knowledge area. For example, it might be useful to be aware of the incidence of common diseases. However be prepared to check out and revise on arrival.
- **Find out which languages and dialects are spoken** in the area around your project and which is the language used in education. An informative site is www.languagesgulper.com as it has detailed descriptions of the main languages of the world.

N.B. If no specific job is available, then part time volunteering is a good way to start as in addition to helping the community you can gain insight into local infrastructures, local parenting, cultural and language issues and identify potential needs on an ongoing basis. Networking within ex-pat communities especially if they are small is invaluable as often it generates information on representatives of NGOs and specific health related charities/groups. Embassies often have funds available for projects which may be related to disability but checks need to be made on individual aims so that applications /proposals can be written with these in mind. Face to face meeting/personal introduction to ambassadorial staff members before making a proposal/application for funds will also help. Embassies often also have an overview of the education and health systems of countries which is very useful if information is not centralised. One key question about education is to discover whether ‘critical thinking is encouraged’. If not, this has implications and repercussions for both the local community. It is important to be aware of this from a cultural perspective. E.g. was it ever encouraged and if so when did it stop?

Resources, assessment tools and intervention methods

Importing materials from home may be of limited value in your new environment.. Assessment tools may be invalid or irrelevant, and therapeutic materials may not be meaningful to your clients. Furthermore, how sustainable can your contribution be if it relies on imported resources?

Take any basic literature that can be of practical rather than academic use.

There are many resources that may be useful to you – please look in the Resource **Section** for further information.

Take teaching materials with you that you might use to deliver participatory training

Learn about new approaches, e.g. CBR, Participatory Rural Appraisal

Don't take too much assessment/treatment material. Try to use local objects/toys in the market or local shops. If you have access to funding think of using it to commission local artisans to make equipment or toys to your specifications.

You could take some assessment materials as examples from which to develop locally and culturally appropriate versions.

Find out about the local level of literacy and drawing style: what is the literacy rate and what style of drawings are people used to? This will help you design your materials. It is always better to get a local person to draw pictures than to draw them yourself.

Take a laptop to store and adapt materials as you go (if access to power).

Find out from local people about child rearing customs, social roles, and views on disability to inform your assessment and intervention methods. Look at approaches to play and adult/child interaction styles before embarking on a play based programme. Find out which stages of development or social competencies are particularly noted in this society and will therefore be points of concern for parents, teachers, medical staff or clients.

Small wind-up torch for looking in mouths (especially for SLTs) and a head torch for personal use.

Supervision/CPD

Just as at home, you will need arrangements for supervision, mentoring and CPD. If direct supervision is not available, try to find someone from home who has experience in the country you are working in. These may take different forms from those you are familiar with at home but they are just as important to ensure you continue to work to a high standard and also to help you to look after yourself:

- How will you deliver **evidence-based practice** if the research to date has examined very different populations/contexts for care?
- You may come across **clinical conditions** that do not exist at home
- How will you ensure you continue to develop **relevant skills** at a high standard?
- You may encounter many **ethical dilemmas** - how will you manage these?
- You will hopefully have many positive experiences but you may also experience some things you find **personally or professionally distressing**. How will you manage these?
- **Supervision** can take a range of forms. Depending on your level of experience and clinical area of work you could consider:
 - Skype
 - Email
 - Other instant messaging
 - Phone (from many countries it is relatively cheap to phone the UK)
 - Peer supervision.
 - Supervision by someone from a different profession
 - In any case, try to avoid working in isolation if possible
 - Try contacting CTI/Adapt/OT Frontiers if you need to find someone who can supervise from home. Both ADAPT and OT Frontiers run a Buddy system to provide support for therapists in the field.
 - For internet or telephone supervision you will need to ensure before you travel that adequate facilities exist. Internet connections are extremely problematic in some areas.
- It may seem obvious but ensure before you travel that you and your supervisor/mentor are both fluent in a shared language.
- If it's your first trip, one important aspect of CPD will probably be developing an understanding of the local context and your role within it. This can be formal and informal. Start before you go, and continue to learn throughout your stay. You can continue your learning when you return to prepare you for future visits! Keep a record, reflect on it, reflect on the results and likely impact of what you do, and use this to identify what else you need to know.

Other useful CPD may include:

- Keeping up to date with **debates in the area of international development, and with local and regional development issues and initiatives**. It's highly valuable to look at discussions that go beyond your own profession.
- The World Health Organisation and UNICEF have useful websites as a starting point.
- Reading research papers relating to **other low-income countries**
- Attending **local training/conferences**, including those that may be delivered by/targeted towards disciplines other than your own. This can be extremely valuable: you may learn about the topic but you can also learn about the levels of existing knowledge/provision and also about local training styles.
- Ask any **previous visitors** for information before you go and for advice on specific topics you need to explore.
- Ensure you know about CPD and practice requirements to retain your professional body and HCPC registration

PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Planning your trip

Take time to research the country you are visiting – consider:

- Cultural issues – especially religion and issues around sexuality.
- Customs - especially for greeting and eating
- Appropriate dress for work and socialising
- Environment in which you will be living – rural /urban
- Climate – different seasons
- National holidays and meaning of the celebration / religious or political context
- Basic local language, especially greetings
- Security and health. The place to go for reliable security information is the **Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)** (e.g. whether the country or district is a safe destination); it also has information on health and entry requirements to most destinations. Be aware that security situations can change at short notice. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
Sending and host organisations may not be very aware of the security implications for foreigners.

- If you are going for several months or more than a year you may wish to arrange to pay voluntary National Insurance contributions in order to maintain the value of your state pension. <https://www.gov.uk/voluntary-national-insurance-contributions/who-can-pay-voluntary-contributions>
- If you are going to be away for some time and you are not on 'pay as you earn' tax, you will need to make arrangements to ensure that your tax returns can be submitted.
- The WHO fact sheet on the top ten causes of death in the world is also useful to review to be more aware of the health status of the people in the area where you may be working - <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs310/en/index2.html>

Your Survival Guide to Safe and Healthy Travel

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow mindedness"

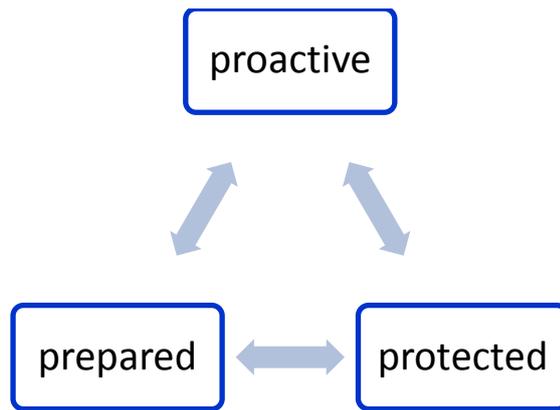
Mark Twain

There are many documents and books to guide you in preparing for your planned trip abroad – this is a summary of some key points, which are based on different professionals' experiences abroad – every person will have different experiences, of course , but look through this to see if it helps you in your planning or advise to others.

Key issues – the 3 P's – being Prepared, Protected and Proactive!!!

Being prepared – focuses on your health—and the health of others—while you are planning to travel and working abroad. Be sure you have up to date information on Vaccinations, Medication, Contract, Insurance, and Passport

Being protected and proactive – focuses on your health—and the health of others—while you are travelling and working abroad. **The 3Ps:**



Check out information on up to date disease outbreaks and trends in your area of travel, plus other problems (violence, unrest etc.)

Look at the global prevalence of certain diseases and link with the area you are going to work in. Think about your Personal Safety and be clear on safety and security issues when working as a humanitarian worker.

As soon as you arrive, or before you go, identify what doctor and dentist you will go to and what their hours are before you need them because if you are ill you may not be able to look around to find one. A good place to find out about safe dentists and doctors is the local Embassy or High Commission, or else ask local European expatriates what doctors and dentists they go to. Remember that when you visit a doctor or dentist you may have to pay at each visit.

Ensure that you have detailed plans for any serious/medical emergencies. Also, give your friends and family at home, contact numbers of at least two people you will be working with and vice versa.

Vaccinations

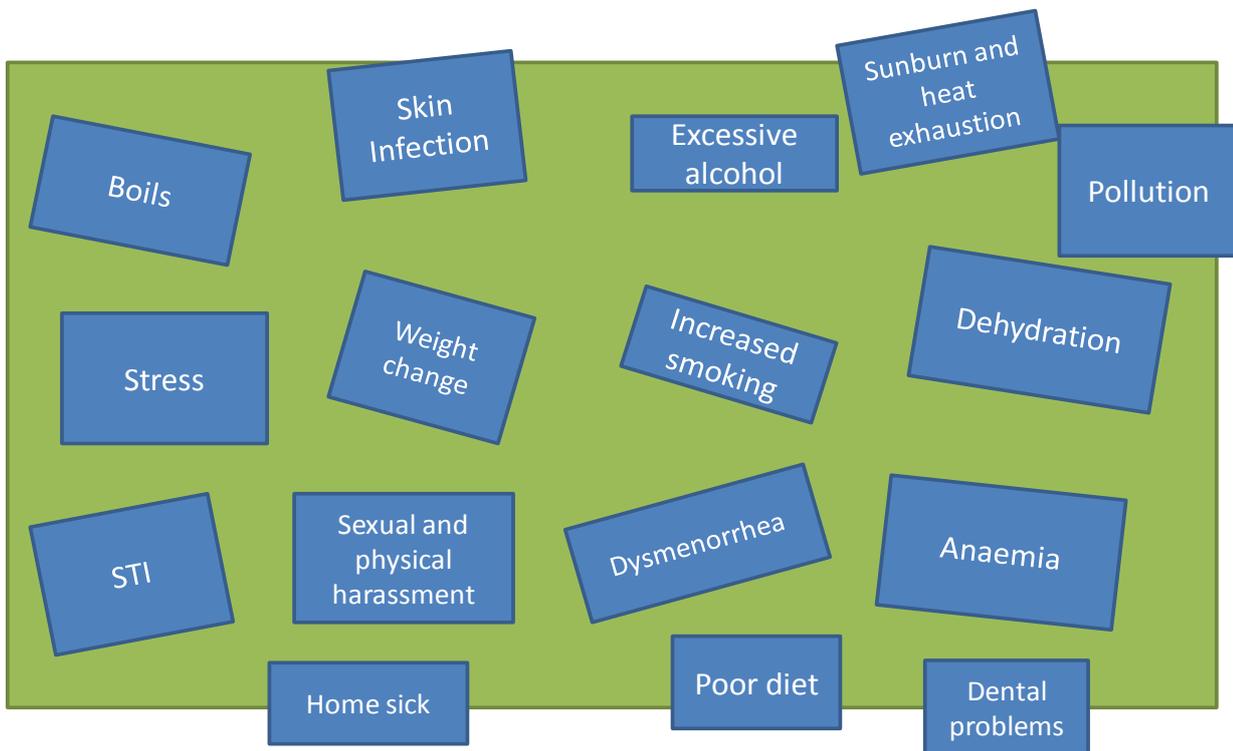
Get advice from your GP re vaccinations

- GPs advise on vaccinations for trips to specific regions/geographical location and can sometimes provide the vaccinations. If the vaccination is not available at your GP, advise to contact a private health clinic in your area.
- Important to be thinking about this well in advance as vaccination regimes may take many weeks, e.g. typhoid vaccinations were in short supply in the UK in 2012-13
- Check out **NaTHNaC** – special site for health professionals <http://www.nathnac.org> - to find out what vaccinations you might need
- Here are 2 other useful sites:
 CDC <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/traveler-information-center>
 WHO <http://apps.who.int/ithmap/> - this interactive map is very useful and informative
- Take a copy of your vaccination booklet with you and Yellow Fever Certificate if travelling in the affected area or travelling from one area to another.
- Some countries allow you to take small packs of sterile needles which may be needed in an emergency.

Top 10 communicable diseases to be aware off and protect you from them

- Diarrhoea,
- Typhoid fever,
- Hepatitis A and B,
- Malaria,
- Cholera,
- Tetanus,
- Meningococcal Diseases/ meningitis,
- Tuberculosis,
- Japanese Encephalitis
- Rabies
- Polio

Other risks of travelling



Often the other risks of working abroad come from your changing lifestyle and living conditions – it is easy to fall into bad habits and not realise that you are getting tired. Try planning a daily routine which includes keeping fit, finding ways to relax and put things in perspective is important, as often you get too involved in the work and forget about yourself.

Medication

- Consult your GP or local pharmacist
- Take enough medication for the time away
- Make sure you get a dental check before you go
- Inform your organisation of your medical issues
- Find out if your medication is available in country
- Check <http://www.nathnac.org> for advice about anti-malarial etc.

- Medicines sold locally may be out-of-date or ineffective because of not having been stored properly. Get your medicines from a reliable source, such as a GP who works for a western High Commission.

Contact and travel arrangements

- Be proactive to make sure you have all your documentation in time
- Sign your contract before you go
- Get your air tickets in time and check them
- Know where you are going and who to meet when you arrive at your destination
- Know where you are living and basic living conditions
- Pack for the climate you are going to live in or find out if you can buy things in the area.
- Know your luggage allowance for each part of your journey (e.g. to African countries it may be double or treble the usual, plus hand luggage. On the other hand, if you are using a local or regional carrier for part of your trip the allowance for that provider may be very low)
- Take cash for taxi fares or excess baggage costs US \$ are usually best in most countries).
- Make sure you know how emergency money can be sent to you if needed.
- Take some gifts for your new colleagues
- Extended family is very important in many African and Asian societies, your new colleagues may appreciate very much seeing photos of your family.
- Register with your local embassy. For information, check the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) website <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
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Insurance Cover

You need to consider:

- Travel insurance (such as flights, luggage and your health when overseas).
- Professional liability insurance
- Check who has to pay for the insurance cover if going with an organisation. Be aware that if going to a country against the travel advice of the FCO, normal travel insurance may not be valid.
- Organise to cover full travel and medical cover, including medi-vac.

- Make sure it is for the correct time period
- Keep copies of the insurance policy with you and leave a copy with someone in your home base
- Keep receipts of any expenses incurred in the field – e.g. for X ray, scan , medication

Passport, Visa & Work Permit

- Make sure your passport is valid before leaving. It should be valid for travel for 6 months after planned return date? Also make sure you have many free pages empty to put stamps for travelling
- Check if you need a visa before leaving UK – if so it can take several weeks, sometimes months to get one so plan ahead. Also check what type of visa you need, as there are often different categories (tourist, business, etc). The UK's Foreign Office website is a good starting point for information – see: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
- For some countries you will also require a work permit – again, ensure you allow plenty of time to research this and the procedures for obtaining one.
- If you need to go to the police to register on arrival , keep the registration document for departure
- Have 6-8 passport photos of yourself in case needed
- Have letter of invitation and address of your organisation or contact at hand for border control
- Have a pen at hand to fill in papers
- Have correct money for your visa if needed
- Try to keep your passport in a safe place during your stay and put a copy in another place

Common Sense – some tips

- Boil it, bottle it, purify it, peel it, cook it or forget it!
- Take packets of oral hydration tablets. Practice good hand hygiene at all times where ever you work
- Avoid motorbikes and wear a seat belt in a car/truck

- Avoid excessive alcohol and illegal drugs
- Be aware of crime hot spots

Prevention is better than Cure – avoiding bites and stings!

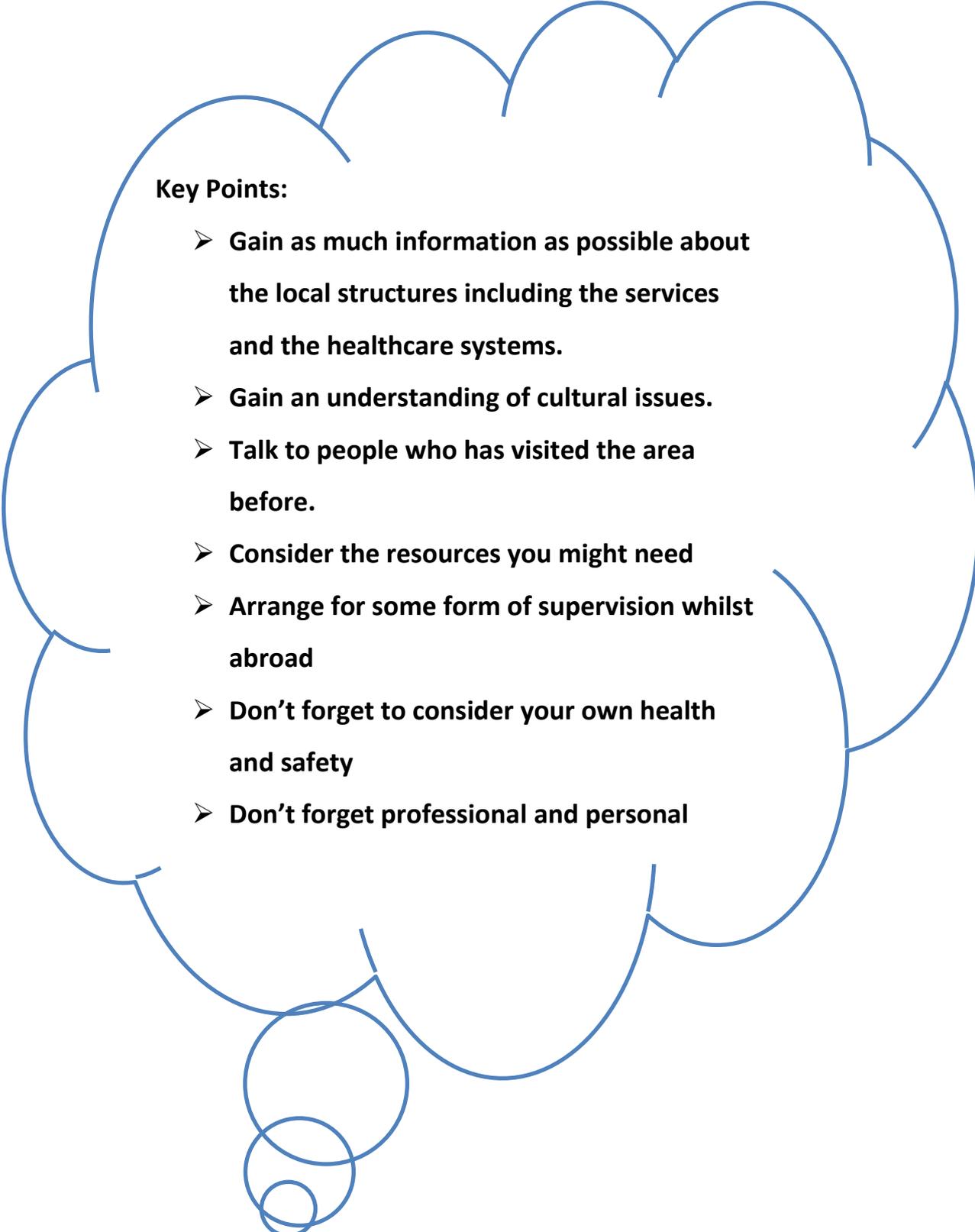


- Long sleeves and trousers, especially at dusk and dawn
- Insect repellent
- Use mosquito nets in endemic regions. Many mosquito nets in hotels or hostels have holes in them; take some tape to cover the holes! Tuck the bottom of the mosquito net underneath the mattress once you are in bed.
- If in rural areas eradicate standing stagnant water
- Use prophylaxis when advised – but be aware it only suppresses symptoms does not prevent infection

Personal Safety – mostly common sense...

- Tell/text someone where you are going/what are you going to do
- Leave non-essential valuables at home – travel light
- Avoid carrying bags at night and being alone
- Make copies of all important documents and store on USB
- Don't take photographs of sensitive buildings/areas
- Avoid public demonstrations and walk away from fights
- Learn your way around or try to look like you know your way around!
- Get recognised by locals to build up safety network

Remember that it doesn't matter how long you have lived somewhere and how you dress, you are always a foreigner and a visitor in this area/country – respect that!



Key Points:

- **Gain as much information as possible about the local structures including the services and the healthcare systems.**
- **Gain an understanding of cultural issues.**
- **Talk to people who has visited the area before.**
- **Consider the resources you might need**
- **Arrange for some form of supervision whilst abroad**
- **Don't forget to consider your own health and safety**
- **Don't forget professional and personal**