

WEST AFRICAN TIPS

(By Dr Keith Thomson)

1. **Airport in Africa**

You must have a valid yellow fever certificate, passport and appropriate visa (or documents). Do not let anyone carry your bags as they will demand a big tip!

2. **Money**

Local currency available f small denominations. Travellers cheques may be more difficult to exchange. Easiest way to transfer money to someone in West Africa is by Western Union. In the UK dial 0800 833833 from your home number and use credit or debit card registered at that address. Once accepted the recipient plus passport and correct answer can pick up money immediately at a Western Union office in the African city specified. When walking around only take the cash you need in a hidden money belt under your clothing jewellery or carry a smart looking camera or handbag. Currency on the Africa Mercy is US dollars.

3. **Malaria**

A very high risk area for falciparum malaria. Preferably wear long sleeves particularly at dusk and dawn. Anopheles mosquitoes make no noise, just float around. Use spray with high DEET content (50% +). Take malarial tablets as recommended by your doctor (Lariam, Malarone or Doxycycline seem to be the current options). Use mosquito net as appropriate if staying off the ship. .

4. **Vaccinations**

Yellow fever essential also recommended Hepatitis A and B, Meningococcal meningitis, Typhoid, Polio, Tetanus, Rabies.

5. **Bars/Restaurants**

ICE in drinks NOT advised (dirty water may have been used). Drink bottled water only make sure that you watch the waiter break the seal. Beware salads, dressings like mayonnaise. West African food tends to be spicy but fish can be excellent. Credit cards are rarely taken except at smart hotels (Visa, Mastercard preferable to Amex.)

6. **Taxis**

Negotiate fare in advance, may require hard bargaining!

If possible find out usual rate. puda pudas (large vans in Sierra Leone) (Tro tro in Ghana) usually run like buses on set routes and have a set rate.

7. **Markets**

Fun but can be exhausting. Try and find out from others what ratio of the local starting price is usually acceptable ie 50%, 33% etc. Look around several stalls to see what is available before starting to bargain. Remember they have all day, you have limited time! Wood carvings should probably be put in a freezer to kill any resident infestation.

8. **Photographs**

Be sensitive to local beliefs take a local African friend with you (to give permission) and there is usually no problem. Obviously digital photos can be Emailed home and African children love seeing their photo on the digital camera screen. Consider taking a small photoprinter (Sony, HP etc) + 6x4 photopaper with you.

9. **Cleaning**

supply of loo paper recommended.

10. **Water**

A large capacity water bottle is useful for long trips or church services (these can last 2-3 hours +)
tablets or other drinks powder can make the flavour better!

11. **Diarrhoea/Vomiting**

MUST keep up fluid and electrolyte intake: Use Dioralyte tabs. (flat Coca Cola is as effective and cheaper) For persistent diarrhoea, Immodium or Lomotil may be useful. Prolonged diarrhoea may require Ciproxin recommended dose (Basingstoke travel clinic) is a one off 1gram dose (x4 250mg tabs)
Bloody Diarrhoea consult doctor
Vomiting/persistent nausea a supply of Domperidone suppositories may be useful but can only be obtained on prescription.