

Briefing Notes

Advance Planning

PASSPORT: You should have yours by now, but be sure you know where it is. Please note that some countries require your passport to be valid for several months AFTER your scheduled date of return. Make sure that your passport has several blank pages available, free of any other stamps, visas, etc. If your passport is new, please sign it. DO NOT pack your passport in baggage that is going to be checked.

VISAS: If you are traveling on a passport other than from your group's country of origin, it is your responsibility to obtain any necessary visas. Please check the requirements with the consulate of each country you will be visiting. You should also ensure that your passport allows you to exit and re-enter your group's country and be sure to bring your residency card with you if necessary.

TRAVELING WITH ALTERNATE AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please note that if you have flights that differ from the group's flights, you are responsible for making your own arrangements to meet up with the group at the hotel and/or for getting to the airport at the end of the tour.

INSURANCE: Check what coverage you already have for property loss or sickness and injury abroad and consider covering at least the deductible. You should also consider trip interruption or cancellation insurance. ACFEA will make application forms available.

MONEY: The golden rule is to use plastic (credit, debit and ATM cards) whenever possible. You receive the best possible exchange rate, you reduce the amount of money you need to carry, and you can obtain cash at any time without needing traveler's checks and your passport. A few points to bear in mind:

- ATMs are very common in most countries and almost all of them accept North American ATM cards
- Make sure your PIN is four numbers (not letters)
- Inform your bank and credit card companies that you will be on a trip by calling the customer service number on the back of the card
- Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted; American Express and Diners Club less so. Leave your Discover card at home
- Some credit cards have a higher currency conversion fee than others. Check with your bank if you have a choice of cards
- Take two credit cards if you can, keeping them in different places
- Traveler's checks are no longer widely accepted. We recommend not depending on them as your main source of currency
- Consider taking some currency of the first country on your tour
- Change cash and travelers checks at banks, rather than a hotel or store, for a better exchange rate (though not as good as at an ATM)
- Most parts of the world have moved toward a "chip and pin" system with credit and debit cards, rather than the "swipe and sign" system we are used to. While cards with chips are starting to be the norm in North America as well, it isn't vital that you have one, as almost all places should still be able to take a signature. We recommend always having a backup form of payment in any case

ELECTRICITY: If you are visiting a country that has 220 volt electrical outlets (the US and Canada use 110 volt outlets) and are planning to take any electrical devices, check whether they work off 220 volts. If not, you will need to buy a converter. In any case, you will need adapters so that you can use the different shaped outlets.

COPIES: Make copies of all important documents (passport, visas, traveler's checks, driver's license, credit cards, etc.). Take one copy with you, leave one with someone at home, and give one to a traveling companion.

MEDICATIONS and PRESCRIPTIONS: Make sure you have a sufficient quantity of any necessary medication for the entire trip, packed in its original container. Take along a copy of the prescription. Pack all medication in your carry-on bag. If possible, find out the overseas equivalent of your medication in case of emergency.

GLASSES and CONTACT LENSES: If you wear glasses or contacts, take along a copy of the prescription and an extra pair.

TOWELS: If your accommodation includes youth hostels or homestays, you may need to take a towel. Your ACFEA Tour Manager will advise you if this is necessary.

MAIL ETC.: Remember to stop delivery of mail, newspapers, etc. You may also want to consider putting lights on timers.

BAGGAGE: Unless portage has been confirmed, you will be responsible for carrying your own bags, including all your souvenirs. For important reasons of space and safety, you MUST limit your baggage to ONE suitcase of maximum total linear dimensions (length + width + height) 62 inches (158 cm) and ONE carry-on bag of maximum total linear dimensions 36 inches (92 cm). Most airlines limit the weight of checked baggage to 50 lbs (22 kg) and airlines will no longer accept bags over 70 lbs (32 kg). You will be responsible for any excess baggage fees. Many airlines limit the weight of your carry-on bag to as little as 13 lbs (6 kg). If you will be carrying on an instrument, this instrument will be your *only* carry-on. **Coaches have only a limited amount of luggage space, and if each person has more than these two bags there may not be enough room for all of the luggage.** Make sure your bags have your name and address (business, preferably) both inside and out.

Any liquids or gels brought on board a plane in carry-on luggage must be contained in bottles 3.4 oz (100 ml) or less and all bottles or containers must fit into one clear, quart-size (950 ml), zip top plastic bag. Prescription medications in label prescription bottles or vials are an exception to this rule. For more information about carry-on restrictions, liquid or otherwise, please go to www.tsa.gov.

At the Airport

PASSPORT: DON'T FORGET YOUR PASSPORT! Have it readily accessible and signed before you check in.

CHECKED BAG: The TSA may need to open your checked bag. There are locks listed on the TSA's web site (www.tsa.gov) promoted as being able to be opened and relocked by the TSA.

FREQUENT FLYER CREDIT: To receive your credit when available, please give your frequent flier number to the airline's agent when you check in and save your boarding passes. Please note that flights as part of a group booking may receive no or reduced mileage credit.

AFTER CHECK IN: Many international flights begin boarding as early as an hour before takeoff. Please be at the gate with plenty of time before boarding.

On the Tour

COURIER: ACFEA couriers are administrators rather than guides. Their task is to ensure that the arrangements ACFEA has made for the group take place as planned. While they will generally pass on any local knowledge they may have, such knowledge should not be expected. Your courier is not a concierge and should not be expected to make individual arrangements.

HOTELS: Hotel rooms overseas are often considerably smaller than in the USA or Canada and can vary in size, shape and quality within the same hotel. Single rooms especially are often quite small. Hotels occasionally make mistakes in room assignments, so please be patient and flexible. If you charge anything to your room (internet, meals, laundry, etc.) please be sure to pay all expenses well ahead of the group's planned check out time to expedite the group's departure.

COACH: The coach is for your private use during the tour. However, your price is based on an agreed itinerary covering a specified length of time and distance. Any extra use may result in additional charges and must be in compliance with strict regulations governing the driver's hours.

AIR CONDITIONING: Unless air conditioning is expressly specified for coaches and hotels, you should not assume that it will be provided. Even if it is, air conditioning overseas is generally less effective and less reliable than in North America.

MEALS: Breakfast is usually 'continental', which varies according to local custom from bread or rolls with butter and jam to a fairly lavish cold buffet. Coffee or tea is included. Depending on local custom, lunch and dinner are usually three-course meals, including water only.

GUIDED SIGHTSEEING TOUR: A 2- to 3-hour orientation tour of the city showing the main points of interest. The narration is given by a professional local guide. Entrance fees, where charged, are generally not included.

TELEPHONES and INTERNET: If you plan to use your mobile phone abroad, check with your provider to be sure that it will work in the countries you will be visiting. If your plan allows international roaming, be sure you know how much you will be paying per minute, per text, and for data usage as international cell phone use fees can be very high. Most phone companies offer short-term plans that can bring down these costs.

If you have a smartphone or tablet, learn about how to turn off cellular data or put the device in "airplane mode" and use the device over Wi-Fi. Many hotels have Wi-Fi, either free or paid, that you can use to access your email and the internet with your device. VoIP applications, such as Skype, allow you to make phone calls over Wi-Fi for little or no additional cost.

Some hotels have public computers or business centers. Be sure to log out of any account you log in to on these computers as they are used by many people. Calling cards are also widely available and lower the cost of calls from pay phones or your hotel room phone.

SECURITY: Please keep all possible valuables in a hotel deposit box. Unless you are using traveler's checks, you will not need your passport with you: a copy will usually be quite adequate. Don't put valuables in a back pocket, do keep a tight hold on your bags (including when sitting in a café or restaurant), be careful using ATMs – and do watch out for others in your group who have forgotten all of the above!

GENERAL COURTESY:

1. Remember your sense of humor! Things will not always go exactly according to plan, and members of the group will not all be angels all the time! A smile and laugh are very infectious and will keep the tour running happily.
2. For the sake of your colleagues, please be *punctual*. Aim to arrive at meeting points at least 5 minutes before required, especially if you are uncertain exactly how to get there.
3. Be careful when and where you take pictures. Often you are not allowed to use flash inside historic buildings. Learn how to turn off the flash as well as any electronic noises your camera might make.
4. Please refrain from conversation when your courier or guide is talking, so that you and your colleagues do not miss important information.
5. If there are any religious buildings on your itinerary, please be aware they may have strict dress codes.

TIPS: It is not necessary for you to tip any drivers or tour guides. However, should you wish to give a discretionary tip to your courier, you might consider \$1 per person per day.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ACFEA will pay \$50 for any photograph taken on tour by an amateur photographer that we subsequently use in promotional material, up to \$100 per photographer. For the picture we select as the best one in our newsletter, we will pay \$250. Please email us your submissions (high resolution digital photos, please), which feature your group on tour, formally or informally, preferably with a characteristic background. You can also submit photos by posting them to our Facebook page (facebook.com/acfea), or by tagging us ("ACFEA Tour Consultants") in them from your album.