

Checklist for International Travel When Adopting



The day has finally come that you, and perhaps your family, will travel for the most important trip of your life. This will bring with it an array of emotions from excitement and elation to uncertainty and fear, which is all very common. These emotions can make you forget that you are not only going to add a member to your family, but you also may be traveling to a developing country, which can create additional health concerns.

Packing for this important trip can feel overwhelming, but here are some tips to get you started. (Find more insights to international travel for adoption from the resources at the end.)

Before you Leave, Become Educated

- Check with your doctor that all travelers are up to date on standard immunizations.
- Find a travel-medicine specialists.
- Search www.istm.org for listing of doctors and clinics in your area.
- See a doctor as soon as possible, as some vaccinations need several doses.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://cdc.org> and click on "Traveler's Health" to discover possible concerns for the country where you'll be staying.
- Search American Academy of Pediatrics, <http://aap.org> for an adoption clinic.
- International Adoption Clinics can be found in many states including Wisconsin.

There are many precautions and tips for international travel that you can research for individual countries. Also, use your adoption agencies' knowledge of traveling and health care precautions.

Adoption agencies have all the suggestions from prior travelers as well as many adoption workers have traveled themselves to orphanages you will be going to. We do recommend that you do your research early so you are amply prepared to travel before your referral comes.

Basic International Travel Tips

- Less is better—you will be going on a long trip with perhaps a change in planes and ground travel. You will become quite tired of dragging too much luggage. You will also have an additional passenger on the way home, your new child! For more packing tips, go to: <http://thereareplaces.com>
- For travel, wear clothes and undergarments without metal zippers or clasps. This will assist in going through customs and security checks.
- If you have had surgery that has left wires or pins in our body, remember your travel card indicating so and be prepared for a longer process through customs and security checks.
- All luggage should have wheels or easily carried, such as a clip on bag or backpack.
- Pack as if you expect to lose a piece of luggage. If you are traveling with a partner or

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other support person, mix your luggage so you have clothing in all pieces.

Carry-on luggage should contain:

- **All** important papers.
- A notarized letter from your child's other parent if you are traveling alone with one of your children. The letter from the other parent needs to state his or her permission for your child to leave the country with you. If there is no adjudicated father, bring the birth certificate showing this to be the case.
- Medicine.
- Some toiletries.
- Extra clothing (including undergarments).

Buy large TSA (Transportation Security Administration) locks for all of your luggage (even if your luggage comes with a small lock). Go to <http://www.tsa.gov> for more information.

Don't forget...

- Bath towel. Many foreign countries have thin small towels.
- Camcorder, camera, and note cards. Much will be happening at once and you may forget moments due to your emotional overload.
- Zip lock bags. These can have many purposes including keeping items away from insects and other animals.
- Wet-wipes. These will make clean-up much easier especially if there is concern for finding clean water.
- Toilet paper. You may not find restrooms with accessible toilet paper and you can leave what you do not use.

- Journal. You will cherish your feelings and thoughts as the years go by. Start your journal with all the emergency contact information you might need.
- Prescription medicines. Keep in original container (for airline inspection) and take more than you would need.
- Small flash light and travel alarm.
- Small travel guides and foreign phrase book.
- Money. Bring new currency (crisp \$50 & \$100 dollar bills) and remember your money belt.
- Color copies of passport and visas. Store away from originals.
- Credit Cards. Call your credit card companies to tell them you'll be traveling. If you seldom travel abroad, your international transactions may be flagged as suspicious and your card will be "locked."
- Health insurance. Be sure your insurance will cover medical emergencies outside of the United States. If not, investigate travel insurance through your credit cards or go to: <http://insuremytrip.com>.

The most important things to bring are a positive attitude and patience. Your trip may be long and so please remember you are representing your country and all adoptive families.

Be patient and flexible as most other cultures do not function on western time or standards. Many tasks may take longer or be more complicated so try to go with the flow. Take in all the different pieces of your child's culture and country. Try to relax and enjoy your time in a foreign country and truly live in each experience of your trip.

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Some of the biggest concerns with international travel are the health precautions. Many of the countries where international adoption occurs have unsafe water supplies which can make eating and drinking a risk.

Following are some ideas and tips for keeping yourself safe from bacterial and viral infection. Talk with your health care professional about other precautions you and your family could take such as bringing certain medications or other ideas to stay healthy for your entire trip.

Health Precautions and Thoughts

- Do not rinse your toothbrush, try using items such as Wisps by Colgate in which no water is needed.
- Wash hands often (use anti-biotic hand sanitizers).
- Use insect repellents that contain DEET.
- If possible wear long sleeves, pants, and hats.
- Eat only in first class-restaurants or in homes of the upper class.
- Do not eat food from street vendors.
- Do not eat any raw food including vegetables, fish, or meat.
- Do not eat or drink milk products unless you are positive they have been pasteurized.
- Do not use condiments.

What to Drink?

- Drink bottled mineral water or carbonated beverages with seal intact. Use a new straw if possible when drinking any beverage.

- Take along a pint-sized water purifier (which you can be get at sportsman shops)
- Boil water for 20 minutes before drinking.
- Bring Halazone tablets as a last resort
- Do not drink beverages with ice.

Additionally

One Wisconsin adoptive parent says emphatically, "Leave the hotel! If you have the opportunity to visit sites in the country, do it. I feel like I'm better equipped to bring our son's culture into our family because we experienced the street markets, toured regional attractions, and spoke with locals."

Adopting internationally is an exciting adventure, but you also must keep in mind there are some important tips to remember. Also, if you happen to fall ill within a year after traveling please be sure to let your doctor know you have traveled outside of the United States.



Resources

Adoptive Families has two excellent resources:

- ***Adoption Medical Travel Guide***, by Deborah Borchers, M.D.
- ***The Top 10 Secrets of Successful Adoption Travel***, by Carrie Howard
<http://adoptivefamilies.org>

Health Precautions for Travelers,
<http://comeunity.com>

Packing for Travel to Adopt Your Child, by Building Blocks Adoption
<http://rainbowkids.com>.

How to Adopt Internationally, by Nelson-Erichsen, Jean and Erichsen, Heino R., Mesa House Publishing, 2003. (Available to check out from ARW.)