

Guidelines for Visitors to Nigeria

It is a privilege to visit and serve in developing countries. First-time visitors will immediately become aware of the poverty and of the extreme differences in their culture and ours. These and many additional factors will greatly enlarge your world view. Be a constant learner and be willing to serve in all ways possible. If others have sacrificed to help you make the journey, consider the fact that you represent these people, your church, your university, IHCF, and most importantly, you are to be an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Please keep this in mind as you are stretched far from your “comfort zone” (fatigue, different foods and smells, heat and humidity, the crowds, being in the minority, and so much more). Above all, resolve to be flexible – be willing to adapt to changes, differences, and things that are unpleasant to you. Retain a sense of humor! Remember, “If it is funny later, it must be funny now!” The differences you find are not right or wrong, but different. Things do not have to be done your way. Enjoy your unique experiences.

- Be culturally sensitive. Ask questions, pay attention, be alert to their way of doing things.
- Observe their manner of dress. Nigerian women do not wear shorts. These are considered provocative apparel. Even slacks should be worn only at the guesthouse or perhaps while traveling. When in doubt, ask the resident missionary. Men must also be observant and dress modestly and appropriately. The women in Nigeria still wear a head covering during worship. Be prepared for this cultural difference.
- Traveling is not done at night unless it becomes absolutely necessary. This is because of the poor roadways with all of their inherent dangers (crowded, poorly marked, poor repair, no services, and the increased presence of robbers at night). Do not accept invitations even from well-meaning nationals to go out at night. Most activities are done in daylight with several of your own group.
- Visitors are not allowed to drive the vehicles. Do not even ask. If you were to be involved in an accident, regardless of whose fault it was, you could be held in custody until the case is settled. Your departure would probably be delayed, causing more expense and trouble. In addition, you are probably not properly licensed. (International Drivers Licenses are not valid in Nigeria). Usually a clinic or hospital vehicle and driver can be arranged for your group for an occasional trip.
- Always check with your supervisor regarding any potential plans to leave the premises. You will need to tell where you are going, with whom, and when you plan to return. Remember, due to a lack of telephones, you cannot call in to report changes of plans.

- Be especially discrete in your male/female interactions. The quite normal and innocent friendliness, easy speech and eye contact between males and females can be misinterpreted by the nationals. It can be looked upon as provocative. Also be cautious about touching. Even the nationals who are married do not hold hands or have any public display of affection. Generally hand holding in Africa is seen between close friends of the same sex. There is no sexual connotation. Interaction between sweethearts from the U.S.A. should not be in public or where it can be observed by the nationals. Public affection is contrary to the African culture. Do not visit each other's rooms or houses alone.
- Do not eat in local restaurants or in homes unless it is recommended by the resident missionaries or your supervisor. One slight mistake in this regard could come back to haunt you for some time. The food and water in our guesthouses is prepared with our delicate intestinal tracts in mind. Bottled water and soft drinks are available in most places. Make sure that the seal on the bottled water has not been broken. Also keep in mind when ordering cold drinks, that ice cubes may be made from impure tap water.
- Nationals will freely ask you for things (for money, books, even your shoes). This is not rude in their culture. Nor is it rude to say "No." A good rule is to ask the missionaries or your supervisor before giving money or things. Of course you have so much compared to them, but giving may not be the wise thing to do.
- There is only one telephone and computer for e-mail at the Nigerian Christian Hospital compound. It is in the house of Bob and Annette Whittaker. This is their private home, and therefore you should be discrete and follow the proper rules for using the phone or computer.
- Be careful of your language and of its content. There may be listening ears that also understand English.
- You will be expected to assist at the guesthouse. After dinner the cook may have left for the evening. All visitors assist in the clean-up. You may also notice that the floor needs to be swept. In general you should be aware of what needs to be done and just pitch in and do it.
- You will need to sign a release for someone in your group, preferably your supervisor, to make decisions for you in case of an emergency.

This list is subject to change. We simply ask that you observe the guidelines in the spirit in which they have been written. Thank you.

In His service,
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