

Preparing for Nigeria

When preparing to go to Nigeria, you are preparing for a life-changing and exciting experience. One busy man said to me, “If it weren’t so much trouble getting ready to go, I would go to Nigeria.” It is true that it requires some effort, but you will be blessed for your efforts. The information here is intended to make it easier for you to prepare.

Through the office of International Health Care Foundation you can receive answers to most of your questions as well as suggestions for each step along the way. Please feel free to call or e-mail gboyd@ihcf.net.

Groups or Individuals

It is best to travel with a group of two or more. If you want to go, we will try to place you with a group going at the time you desire to go. Occasionally one will travel alone, but we discourage this for a first-time visitor. It is generally less expensive per person when groups stay at the El Monte guesthouse, since the expense of paying a cook and purchasing food can be shared by a group rather than being paid for solely by one individual.

Medical Education

We want to encourage medical, nursing and other health care students to go to our Nigerian hospitals. Academic credit can often be obtained for service there, depending on the length of your stay and the extent of your medical involvement. We also have clinics in Ghana where you could serve.

Passport and Visa

You must have a passport and a visa in order to enter either Nigeria or Ghana. Passport applications can be obtained at your post office or at your local county clerk’s office. Visa applications can be obtained at our office. When you have your passport pictures made, have a few extras made for your visa and to carry with you in case needed.

Travel arrangements must be made two or three months in advance (or even earlier) to assure getting seats on your desired flights. You must have travel arrangements made before applying for a visa. You can obtain the missionary discount through one of the agents we use regularly.

A letter of invitation is also required and must be sent with your visa application. We arrange for this letter of invitation.

PRINT in upper case the requested information on your visa application. Under “Reason for journey,” print “Visitor.” Do not put anything about work, which is a “red flag” to the embassy. The address in Nigeria is: Nigerian Christian Hospital, Mile 11, Ikot Ekpene Road, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

What to include in your Fed Ex package:

- completed visa application with picture attached
- your passport (It must be valid for at least 6 months)
- your letter of invitation
- copy of your round-trip flight itinerary or photocopy of your entire ticket
- a check for Tonya Ortiz, covering the cost of the visa, along with Tonya's fee and the Federal Express charges.

Send by Federal Express to Tonya Ortiz. The Fed Ex address is: 1019 First St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005. Mark your package "Hold for Pick-up." Call Tonya (703-486-3982) to inform her that the package is being sent.

Immunizations

Obtain a shot record booklet where you receive your immunizations. Have all of your current immunizations recorded in this booklet, which may be asked for when you enter Nigeria. This booklet will also help you to keep your immunizations updated.

Recommended

Keep your tetanus and polio updated
 Hepatitis A
 Hepatitis B
 Typhoid (injection or possibly oral form available)
 Meningococcal vaccine

Required

Yellow Fever immunization (good for 10 years)
 Malaria
 Malaria is to be taken seriously. Take prophylactic medication and use mosquito nets. (Nets are provided at our NCH guesthouse.)

Recommended prophylactic:

Mefloquine (trade name is Lariam)
 This is currently the drug of choice, according to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. The adult dose is one 250mg tablet per week. Start by taking one tablet one week before your departure date, and take one tablet on the same day each week while in Nigeria. Continue to take a tablet each week for four weeks after returning to the States. Mefloquine is safe for children, also, but the dosage is adjusted for weight. Currently the tablets cost us \$3.00 each.

Doxycycline (Vibramycin)

The dose is 100mg daily for adults. It is not recommended for children under age 8. One must also be aware of photosensitivity when taking Doxycycline. (When in doubt, consult a physician.)

Malarone (Atovaquone/proquanil)

This is a relatively new combination from Glaxo Wellcome. Initially it seems to be doing well. The dose for adults is one tablet per day. Children can take it adjusted for weight.

Chloroquine

There is so much chloroquine resistance in Africa that as a single medicine it has almost no place now. Some take it once weekly (300mg base) combined with another medicine – Paludrine (proquanil) at 200mg per day. Paludrine cannot be obtained in the U.S.A.

Fansidar (pyrimethamine –sulfadoxine)

This can be taken as a treatment for malaria. The treatment is easy – three tablets taken at one time. Do not take if you are allergic to sulfa drugs.

Insurance

Health Insurance:

You should check with your insurance company regarding coverage outside of the U.S.A. Most policies do not include international coverage. Short-term travel insurance policies can be obtained on a per day or per week basis for about \$3.00 per day. The policy includes foreign medical care and evacuation to a hospital in emergency cases; it also offers a death benefit. We require all of our short-term missionaries to take out such a policy. Please check with our office for specifics.

Copies of your documents

We recommend that you make photocopies of the following and keep them in a separate place where you can find them if needed:

your passport

the visa page of your passport

your letter of invitation

your “travel letter” for customs

your diplomas, professional licenses and board certificates, if medical list of contents of footlockers containing medicines or supplies which you are taking to Nigeria

Airlines

Air France, Lufthansa and Virgin Air are currently the only airlines flying directly from Europe into Port Harcourt (avoiding Lagos). Port Harcourt is about a two-hour drive from the Nigerian Christian Hospital. A hospital driver will pick you up in the hospital vehicle. A number of other European airlines fly into Lagos, but we do not recommend those airlines because the trip often takes a day longer and is more of a hassle, since one has to transfer to the domestic airport to get a domestic flight to Port Harcourt. If the flight arrives in the late afternoon or evening, you will have to spend the night in Lagos, which can be expensive and frightening to the inexperienced traveler. We can help you with your travel arrangements. Remember to check all information on your tickets. Serious mistakes are sometimes made, and the sooner you discover them, the easier it will be to correct them. Several travel agents offer the missionary discount on tickets (RAPTIM), which usually saves at least \$300.

Luggage

Have your travel agent check on the size and weight allowance of your carry-on and of your luggage. Find out how many bags you can check and how much they can weigh.

Overweight bags can be very expensive. Some airlines are very strict about carry-on luggage and will make you repack to decrease weight. You may carry your camera and purse separately. Be sure to label properly all check-in baggage (bags, trunks, footlockers, etc.). Weigh them before going to the airport and check the dimensions allowed. (length + height + width). The weight limit for checked bags is usually 70 lbs. An extra bag or an overweight bag may cost from \$75 to \$150. Remember that if you layover in Europe for more than 12 hours (unless it is the airline's "fault"), you will be held to the European weight limit, which is only 44 pounds per bag, and you would have to pay overweight for the 70 lb bags. When you check in at your original airport, be certain that your luggage is checked all the way to Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Double-check your stubs!!!

Nigerian Airport Customs Agents

You may have heard some negative stories about these agents, but they are generally very cooperative. Dr. Henry Farrar says, "Just keep talking and smiling." Have all of your bags properly labeled, and have your list of contents at hand. You should also have a letter from IHCF, telling of your mission. We usually do not show this unless the customs agents start asking questions. Do not volunteer information; simply answer their questions or show them your list or your letter. Tell them that you are bringing these things for the Nigerian Christian Hospital, and that nothing is for resale. You are going there to visit and donate your services. Do not say that you are going there to work, as this may cause them to ask for your work permit. You are going to visit. All of the things you are taking have been donated for this mission hospital. You may want to repeat this a few times. We have had no problems in the past and have found the officials to be quite congenial.

Money

If you are frugal, you will need perhaps only \$3,000 for a one-month trip to Nigeria. The major expenses are 1) preparations: pictures, passport, visa, vaccinations, personal medicines, supplies, clothes and incidentals 2) airfare 3) living expenses (currently the cost of staying at El Monte guesthouse is about \$8.00 per day, which covers food, utilities, salaries for the workers, etc.) 4) some miscellaneous expenses.

Carrying money

We recommend that you carry about \$500 in cash for expenses in Nigeria (4 one-hundred dollar bills and 5 twenties). You will receive a better exchange rate for larger bills, and they are easier to carry. A money belt or a pouch hidden under your shirt or blouse is recommended. Thieves are tricky. Do not display valuables openly. Do not reveal where you are carrying your cash. Men, do not carry your wallet in your back pocket. Purse-snatchers and briefcase thieves are common in public places, in airports, restrooms, on trains and busses. Be alert but not paranoid. It is easy to be distracted by someone bumping you while someone else picks your pocket.

Credit Cards

Credit cards can be used in some places but are not commonly used for everyday shopping in Nigeria. If you take one, do not use it unless necessary. A personal check can

sometimes be cashed at NCH in cases of emergency. Traveler's checks are difficult to cash in Africa, and the exchange rate is much lower.

Tax Deductions

There are ways to receive a tax deduction for your mission trip. You, or those helping you, can make a contribution to IHCF, and we can purchase your ticket and pay for your shots with these funds; or you can have your church do the same. (We cannot issue tax receipts unless the contributions are made to IHCF.)

Contact Information

There are guidelines for using the phone or sending e-mail messages from Nigeria. Please adhere to them.

You will be asked to pay extra for your usage. Keep your messages short and do not send or receive

attachments or pictures. You can call home or receive messages from the Whittaker's private phone.

The number from the U.S. is 011-234-803706-3672. Their private e-mail is nchwhit@phca.linkserve.com.

Miscellaneous Important Information

Driving Vehicles

You, as a visitor, should not drive. Do not ask to drive. The hospital will provide drivers for you when needed. The main reason for your not driving is the potential trouble that could result if you had an accident that caused damage or injury. You could be delayed in the country indefinitely and even put in prison. International drivers' licenses are not recognized in Nigeria.

Leaving the hospital

Do not leave the hospital compound to go into town without properly notifying the person or persons in charge of your group. Please do not ask for transportation to go shopping. A time will probably be arranged for a group to go shopping; or, if Mrs. Whittaker is going to Aba for any reason, you may be permitted to go along. The hospital vehicles are primarily used for the business of the hospital and are not available to visitors.

Weather

It will generally be hot and humid. There are two seasons: the rainy season (about July until December) and the dry season (about January until June). It is hot and humid during the rainy season, and it is hot during the dry season. Take your favorite sunscreen.

Clothes

Lightweight, loose-fitting clothing is recommended. Cotton and cotton blends are best. Medical workers find their scrubs to be comfortable. Scrub dresses are also appropriate. Shorts are not in order. Ladies should not wear slacks except at the guesthouse. Dresses of quite modest length are in order. Church wear is dressier. Nigerian men often wear a

suit. Visiting men usually at least wear a tie with a short-sleeved dress shirt. A lightweight jacket is always appropriate. Clothes are washed (by hand) at the guesthouse twice weekly. It is best to take clothes to last a week. Footwear should be comfortable. Some take sandals, especially for relaxing.

Food

You will be fed quite well at the guesthouse. It is mostly familiar food and well prepared. You will be served an occasional Nigerian meal, which is very tasty. Water is boiled and filtered, then cooled. Cold sodas are usually available as well.

Coffee drinkers, take your favorite instant coffee! Nescafe can be purchased there.

Behavior

Be culturally sensitive! You are a guest and are to be an ambassador for Christ. See our **GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS TO NIGERIA AND GHANA.**

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