

Helpful Guidelines for Your Trip to Uganda



Thank you so much for choosing to help Africa Renewal Ministries and the people of Uganda. We are grateful for your willingness to reach out to those in need. This handout is designed to give teams an introduction to the Ugandan culture and help you maximize your time and impact during your trip. Whether your service here is for physical improvement, spiritual welfare or a combination of the two, this training guide can help you to:

- Be culturally sensitive
- Maximize your time
- Be well prepared
- Maintain your personal health and safety

Being culturally sensitive will greatly help you to avoid common mistakes that can lead to offense and embarrassment to you and the local population. For example, if you are a man and another man held your hand as he showed you the way to his office, you might feel compelled to react with reproach or anger. You would not know that in Uganda it is common for men to be much more affectionate than in other countries and it means nothing more than a gesture of friendship. Knowing this fact prior to having that experience will help you not to feel awkward or have an improper reaction.

When you know the culture, you can be prepared physically and emotionally for differences in behavior, dress and conversation and it can help you avoid some of the uncomfortable feelings of culture shock. Please take the time to read through this guide for some helpful tips on your preparation for and actions during your trip to Uganda.

Introduction to the Ugandan Culture

Why be culturally sensitive? It is necessary for your welfare as a team member and for the Ugandans who will experience your influence long after you are gone.

- Outside of western culture, the world's perception of westerners is derived from TV, news and movies. They have an **incomplete picture**. In Uganda, any light-skinned person is placed in this western category. Often times, this is the worst impression. For example, women are associated with pop idols; therefore, western women are thought to be promiscuous. You will be viewed by your host country based on their stereotype of westerners.
- Each action that you make to counter that stereotype improves the Ugandans' view of you as a person and of westerners as a whole.
- Many times what you think is acceptable or beneficial is actually **harmful** to the Ugandan people and society.
- The work you are doing for the people of Uganda is for their physical or spiritual welfare. Money and gifts, which are things of immediate pleasure, do not necessarily give lasting

satisfaction, relief or assistance.

- **Ugandans need to see relief come from God through the church or organization**, not the individual visitors.

Whenever there is something which you feel led to do, please, before taking any action or making any promises, talk to an ARM representative for guidance on the best action with regards to Ugandan culture.

There are plenty of things that you will see in any new culture that you are not used to and many things that are acceptable in other cultures but taboo in Uganda. A few examples of each are below.

Commonly seen or experienced in Uganda:

- Straight men holding hands or showing affection
- Body odor
- Women breastfeeding in public
- Physical friendliness – everybody shakes hands, sometimes for the entire duration of a conversation
- Lack of toilet facilities – often just a hole in the ground inside a shed

Taboo in Uganda:

- Conversation about pregnancy – miscarriages and the infant mortality rate are so high in Uganda that we don't talk to a woman about her pregnancy.
- Conversations about relationships, particularly in the physical sense.
- Public displays of affection between men and women – these are embarrassing to all around. Keep it behind closed doors! This includes holding hands.
- Discussions about personal information with someone who is not a very close friend.
- Smoking and drinking – out in the bush there is no distinction between having a drink and being drunk, and smoking is simply looked down upon by everyone.
- Talking about boyfriends/girlfriends – do not say that you have a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend". For some Ugandans this means that you have a physically-based relationship with someone. You may say that you are dating someone or in a relationship with someone.

Understanding the Ugandan Culture

Men and Women

When thinking of the roles of women and men in Uganda, imagine the US during the late 1800's. Men are the leading figures in society and at home, usually raising the funds to support the family. Women are more home-based – raising children, tending gardens, and maintaining the home. When women work outside of the home, it is generally in teaching, nursing, housekeeping or secretarial positions.

Because men are the leading figures in the society, it is more common for men to be forward and willing to introduce themselves. Women tend to behave more modestly, seeming shy. They may not approach you or speak to you directly right away. This is not because they do not want to talk or meet you, so please take the time to introduce yourself to both men and women.

Children – the most blessed among us

Children are children no matter where you go. They smile, laugh, tell jokes and tease. Here in Uganda, they will yell to visitors, stare, ask for gifts and candy, ask for your address, come hold your hand, ask you “How are you?” a million times, and play with every string, gadget and piece of jewelry you have. Don't be afraid to play with them and teach them new games and songs – they will teach you too. Just be aware of the “Don'ts” list on page 5 when interacting with the children.

Fitting In

Dress Code

What you wear says a lot about what you think about yourself and those you are visiting, so most of the time you should dress in a nice casual way. That is, wear something that you would wear to a moderately priced restaurant back home. For men, jeans are ok, for ladies a comfortable, relaxed knee-length or longer skirt and blouse. It is import to not dress in a way that shouts “money” or dress down in worn-out clothes that say “I pity you”. You should bring nicer clothes to wear in church and relaxed clothes for everyday wear. Most of all, do not dress in an immodest way. A good rule of thumb is not to wear anything that calls attention to any part of your body. This includes too much jewelry and dangle type earrings and necklaces (children will pull them). As a visitor in Uganda remember that you are representing an entire culture through your appearance and behavior. Whether you feel it is for westerners or Christians, be modest in your representation.

Again, MODESTY is the best policy

Women

Everyday wear should consist of dresses or skirts and blouses. If you participate in physical labor, loose-fitting long pants are acceptable. However, when the work that requires long pants is finished, please change back into a skirt or dress. This is necessary to show respect to the Ugandan culture where women almost always wear skirts. Shorts are NEVER acceptable beyond sleepwear. Some ideas are listed below:

Skirts/Dresses:

- Loose-fitting
- Length should be below the knees. Legs are very provocative in the Ugandan culture. Keep yourself safe and don't live up to the stereotype of Americans!
- Many fabrics can be sheer in the sunlight. If a skirt does show some light or is questionable, please wear a slip.

Shirts:

- Loose-fitting
- Must have sleeves
- Should be made of a breathable fabric to avoid heat exhaustion
- During the rainy season avoid white! We do not want to have a wet T-shirt contest!
- T-shirts are acceptable outside of church. If the shirt has writing on it, Christian messages are preferred to avoid cultural misconception through display on your clothing.

Pants:

- Loose-fitting
- Breathable fabric
- Loose-fitting
- Durable
- LOOSE-FITTING!!!

Men

Fortunately for men, the culture is much more relaxed in dress. Both pants and shorts are acceptable as well as any shirt with sleeves. Remember a few things:

- Keep clothing loose.
- T-shirts are acceptable outside of church. If the shirt has writing on it, Christian messages are preferred to avoid culture misconceptions through display on your clothing.
- Always wear a shirt! Although in many cultures it is acceptable for a man to be seen by a woman when he is not wearing a shirt, it is not so in Uganda. It is extremely embarrassing for a man to be seen by a woman without shirt for both the man and woman. Physical labor is the only exception to this rule, where it is appropriate to have your shirt off.

Footwear for Men And Women

- Remember there are many parasites that would love to make a home in your skin.
- As often as possible wear closed-toed shoes.
- If you must wear sandals please, for your own safety, do not wear them in the bush. The danger of jiggers, ticks or other parasites is too high.

Money

The Ugandan currency is Uganda shillings. Visit <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic> for the current exchange rate. You will get the best exchange rate with \$50 and \$100 bills. Please bring the newest bills possible, as the exchange bureau may not accept older bills. Make sure that bills are dated in the year 2000 or later.

Do's And Don'ts

DO NOT:

- Give money to individuals, including children. Give to ARM and designate the funds.
- Give toys, candy or gifts to Ugandans. Instead, give love, hugs, smile, sing songs, etc.
- Sanitize your hands in front of Ugandans. Sanitize discretely, especially before eating.
- Give out your home address or personal email. Give your church or organization address or email.
- Promise to pay for a child's school fees or sponsor a child.
- "Sponsor" a child before finalizing it with the ARM office.

Why all this precaution? Why the rules? Aren't gifts good?

You would think so, but the problem with giving gifts, money, sweets, etc. teaches the Ugandans that:

- Begging is okay and generally brings success.
- If you need or want something, go to the individual visitor.
- Westerners have everything, and we have nothing. If you can afford to fly here, you are rich in the mind of the Ugandans.

Truly, begging cannot be tolerated. Not only is this behavior destructive and degrading to the personal culture of one child, but consider this: in the bush some parents save all year so that they can have enough to buy **ONE PIECE OF CANDY** for their child at Christmas. If you are throwing candy and toys at these children, not only do they look up to you as the rich gift-giver, but they also

look down on whatever their parents can give to them. It is destructive to the Ugandan family structure when you give gifts in this manner.

In the end, we are all working to help the children and the culture. The children and the community need to know that the parents and the organization are the ones to go to when there is a need. Anytime a child or adult asks for something, it is because someone else set up a pattern long ago. Please, for the sake of the culture, LEARN TO SAY NO. Practice with other team members: ask each other for candy, toys, school fees, and respond by telling each other to go to the church or that you are not there to give them those things but to build a home, give them good health through the church clinic or give them an even better gift, the love of Jesus Christ. It is hard to deny a child, but again, this is for preservation of a society.

When Is Giving Appropriate?

If you wish to give money, please give to the Africa Renewal Ministries office. The staff knows where the money is most needed and can be sure to designate funds accordingly. If there is a specific project to which you wish give, just make it known when you make the donation. There is always the opportunity to sponsor a child, which is a great way to impact a child's life. The people working in the sponsorship program can help you with that decision. Sponsorship is the best gift to give to a child. This gift will improve the quality of life for your child for the rest of his/her life because of the guaranteed education, free medical care in the ARM clinic, one meal a day, vitamins and often a home to live in.

If you still wish to bring gifts for children you may do so, but please give them to the ARM administrative staff to be used as needed by the school as rewards for good behavior or top grades. The best things to bring for children are pens, pencils, crayons, Bibles, notebook paper, books on prayer, stickers, soccer balls and any other educational materials. These gifts are more useful to the children and still enjoyed as much as candy, little toys and match box cars, which have short-lasting value and can pose a choking hazard. If you feel a strong need to share food or money with a specific family, please ask your ARM Guide if it is appropriate.

Health and Sanitation

There are a few guidelines you need to follow to stay healthy during your trip:

- Always drink bottled water or water from containers that has been purified and filtered.
- Do not eat from local street vendors or unfamiliar restaurants. Refer to your ARM Guide for places acceptable for westerners' dining. Your ARM representative will take you to somewhere that is acceptable.
- Be careful with fruits and vegetables that are already prepared. Prepared meals at ARM-referred locations are the exception. As a rule, if you can wash and peel it, it is safe.
- Be careful with germs that you will come in contact with through everyday physical contact, such as holding hands or picking up children. Do not chew on your nails because you will be taking the germs directly into your mouth.
- If anyone ever spits, sneezes or coughs on your body, particularly your face immediately clean the area with clean water and preferably soap or sanitizer.
- Do not approach or attempt to help anyone who is bleeding or vomiting – contact the nearest health professional to help with their situation.
- Always clean your hands before eating and preferably sanitize regularly for the health of your team.

- Sodas are popular drinks for Ugandans and Westerners. It is safe to use a straw to drink from the bottle because the bottles are re-used.
- **GET YOUR VACCINATIONS!!!!** To see which vaccinations you need to for your visit to Uganda, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/eafrica.htm#vaccines>.
- Always wear insect repellent with at least 25% Deet and sunscreen with an SPF factor of 30 or higher. We are in a higher malaria-concentrated area on a lake that breeds mosquitoes as well as on the equator.

Preventative action is always the best defense, but remember do not be overly rude when cleaning your hands after holding the hand of child. Do not be blatantly disgusted by the touch of other people because this can be very offensive or embarrassing for the nationals.

What, Then, Is My Role Here?

Once again, ARM thanks you for your commitment to serve in this society, not for self-glorification, but for the betterment of those you serve. Simply remember that you are here to help the people. The best help you can give is to help them help themselves. Would a farmer be able to accomplish the work when you are gone? The same applies to any service you perform for another person.

YOU ARE PARTNERS working hand in hand with ARM!

Help us to teach the people how to have a better Uganda – through the work of their hands and by learning from the experience of those from more well-developed societies. We look forward to greeting you in Uganda!