**Tips for Trips: Visiting Returnees**

* Use an experienced travel agent and tell him/her what you would like to do. Be sure to also research the details such as shots, visas, weather, currency, etc. with the travel agent, on the internet, and with international students you know from the countries you will be visiting.
* Have clear objectives (encourage them, learn about their lives and cultures, etc.) Have a list of 25 good questions that will help you ask, listen, and discover how your returnee friend is really doing.
* Raise up a prayer support team, then report to them when you return.
* Bring gifts (e.g. calendars, hand towels, books, etc.) and photos of family and friends, including any old photos that include your friends when they were with you in the U.S.
* Staying with students is more draining, so mixing homestays with hotel stays can keep you fresh. Ask returnees to recommend and book the hotel for you. They will get a much better rate! When appropriate, it is fine to stay with a returnees at their invitation, but be sensitive to their situations.
* Be flexible. Don’t worry if you have minimal communication from the returnee and your plans are still up in the air when you arrive. Just be sure to carry current contact information for the returnees you want to see.
* Include sight-seeing and rest days. Try to plan weekends in major cities in order to see as many returnees as possible and avoid conflicts with their work.
* Try to plan your larger gatherings early in your stay in a particular place; this will generate individual meetings with returnees who want to get together with you. Have returnee friends select the best time and place for these gatherings. At the gathering, get everyone’s current contact information. Ask your returnee friends to contact and invite other returnee friends. Try to connect returnee friends with local Christians, other returnees, or missionaries.
* Introduce your returnee friends in the same city to each other…and to ISI staff living overseas.
* Focus on visiting returnees you know personally. Avoid asking favors of returnees to whom you have not personally ministered. Trying to meet the returnees known by a co-worker or other ISM worker is only rarely productive and can sometimes be a burden. ****If you do plan to meet another staff’s or volunteer’s returnee, it is helpful to bring a gift from that individual staff to personally deliver to the returnee and as an incentive for the meeting.
* Travel with a “research” mindset to discover the challenges facing returnees, but avoid making returnees feel like you are “checking up” on them spiritually.
* When appropriate, try to meet the returnees’ parents, family, friends, church, fellowship, etc.
* Be prepared to engage in Bible discussions or talks on issues important to returnees. Prepare a talk in advance in case you are asked to speak to a group or church.
* Be prepared to experience great generosity from the returnees—It is their way of expressing how much they appreciate the time and expense you have invested to visit them.
* Be prepared to answer questions about American politics!
* Make a short PowerPoint or video to show to them regarding your ministry back home.
* Be prepared to offer suggestions about online resources (e.g. messages, Bible studies, M28 App, etc.)
* Take time to journal, pray, think, and plan during and after the trip.

See also Nate Mirza’s book, *Home Again: Preparing International Students to Serve Christ in their Home Cultures, (*Chapter 8—Visiting Former Students, pp. 103-110). Available through NavPress or Amazon

**Country Specific Tips**

Following are some country-specific tips that we hope are helpful to you.

**JAPAN VISITS**

*(Source: Dan Brannen)*

**General Tips**

* Plan a returnee party (open house style, bring name tags, discussion questions) as early as possible in your visit. Weekends are almost always the best. Schedule individual meet-ups for those returnees who would like one and for those who can’t attend party. Ask an available returnee to host the returnee party, food, etc.—explain your goals.
* When meeting individual returnees think “train stations” as best places to meet near their work or home.
* Whenever possible accompany returnees to church or introduce them to a church in their area (Liz Godwin (lgodwin@isionline.org) has a list of churches, contact persons, &Christian bookstores.)
* Use ATM machines for cash.
* Phones can be rented at the airport; internet can be accessed at stores, airports, some train stations or cafes, such as Starbucks.
* July is hot. August is hotter. Bring clothes that kept you cool.

**Transportation Tips**

* For local transportation: Get a Suica or Pasmo card that work on trains, subways, & buses.
* Definitely buy a Japan Rail Pass if you are planning more than a week of distance travel (One week cost is approx. $250).
* Check out English internet sites for train schedules, routes, & costs (e.g. <http://www.jorudan.co.jp/english/norikae/> or <http://www.hyperdia.com/en/>).

**Food Tips**

* Grocery stores are located on the basement floor of department stores.
* Cheap eats include ramen shops and family chain restaurants like Saizeria, Jonathan’s, or Gasuto. You can also get pre-packaged food at ubiquitous mini-marts. (7Eleven, Family Mart, and Lawsons)
* Japanese generally don’t eat on streets, or *local* trains, or in public places.

**Communication Tip**

* An excellent English to Japanese and Japanese to English free app is available at <http://www.imiwaapp.com/>

**Customs Tip**

* Do not bring Sudafed or medicines for ADD. Beef jerky will also be confiscated at customs.

**Gift-giving Tips**

* Japan is the land of gift-giving. Bring local specialty items from home, (e.g. smoked salmon, Applets & Cottlets, Market Spice Tea for Washingtonians, books [i.e. *The Case for Christ (Lee Strobel)* in Japanese is available at Word of Life Press Ministries or Multi-Language Media; *Finding Rest* (Kent Sisco) available on Amazon, *God’s Fingerprints* *in Japan*, Versions 1 & 2, DVDs, also available on Amazon).

**Accommodations Tips**

* Some returnees may invite you to stay in their homes, although this was rare in years past. Or you can check out Super Hotel chain, or Sakura Houses for short-term stays. OMF & Send International have Guest facilities for missionaries near Tokyo, but you will need to book early. Some churches also have guest facilities. *[Sorry, the TEAM Center is currently closed in the summer 2017 for renovations, but for the future trips, this is a great place to stay and meet returnees.]*

**CHINA VISITS**

*(Source: Andy Pearce)*

* Set up a schedule to see several individuals or couples for 1-2 hours of deep conversation each day.
* Research the historical or cultural attractions in the city to which you are going and ask a returnee to take you there.
* Use private rooms in restaurants when possible in order to avoid second-hand smoke and for a quieter environment.
* Research the Christian environment in the area to which you are going. Don't be afraid to go to government-approved churches. Some are very good.

**INDIA VISITS**

*(Source: Andy Pearce)*

* Stay with one returnee and his/her family as much as possible and let them take you sightseeing (hotels can be challenging).
* Ask the one with whom you are staying to take you to visit other returnees (getting around can also be challenging).
* Research the food you might be eating ahead of time and request non-spicy versions.
* Avoid eating street food.

**For additional country-specific tips/info, contact these ISI team members:**

* China-Mike and Kathy Cain (mcain@isionline.org)
* Singapore-Andy Pearce (apearce@isionline.org)
* Malaysia-Kelly Quek (kquek@isionline.org)
* Thailand and Indonesia-Wichit Maneevone (wmaneevone@isionline.org)
* Korea-Ron Bunyard (rbunyard@isionline.org), Leon Harper (lharper@isionline.org), Si-Chun Song/Min Rep (springcomesgrace@gmail.com), or see Liz Godwin (lgodwin@isionine.org) for a short list of Seoul churches
* Taiwan-Andy Pearce (apearce@isionline.org)
* Philippines-Kerry and Josie Sinclair (ksinclair@isionline.org) or Dan Ubaldo (dubaldo@isionline.org).
* India-Andy Pearce (apearce@isionline.org)
* Japan-Liz Godwin (lgodwin@isionline.org) or Dan Brannen (dbrannen@isionline.org)

