

**AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL HEALTH ALLIANCE, INC.**

**BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED  
FROM EXPERIENCED AIHA PARTNERS**

This document is a set of best practices and lessons learned which was compiled using the results of a survey of experienced partners, and taking excerpts from final reports prepared by graduating partners. The purpose was to capture as much as possible the lessons learned by AIHA partners, through years of experience both in building partner relationships and planning and coordinating training activities.

The experienced partners' recommendations are given as bullet points, organized by areas of focus. To a great extent, the comments have been taken word-for-word from experienced partners.

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### BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCED AIHA PARTNERS

#### Building Partner Relationships

- *Building peer-to-peer relationships, based on trust with NIS partners*
- *Establishing and maintaining effective communication*
- *Gaining trust and support at all levels of NIS health and regional administration*
- *Being sensitive to the political and cultural dynamics faced by your partners*

#### **Establishing Peer-to-Peer Relationships**

- Make a conscious effort to act as true partners (peers);
- Try to minimize the sense that there is a senior partner who controls the purse strings
- Plan as equals; work together from the outset to establish areas of focus;
- Orient delegations to treat partners as peers, rather than students (guard against the “ours is the best and only way” attitude);
- Develop bilateral teaching/learning relationships; US teams were often instructors, but always students. Be aware that working with NIS colleagues can force US participants to re-examine the basic premises of our own systems.
- For US partners, exposure to a different way of thinking has been very valuable. The challenge of re-thinking the “way things are done” in the US, working to solve problems of concern to our partners, in the context of limited resources.(limited funding as well as limited “people power” for making change) leads to professional growth on the US side. Participants reported that partnership activities enhanced their communication skills and ability to “think out of the box” as they discovered different ways of accomplishing goals.
- Consistently encourage growth, learning and stretching of goals -- your own and your partners’.
- Partners did not always agree on all subject matters but both sides benefited from working as a team, learning to respect the opinion of each team member and to find a common ground.

#### **Building Trust with Partners**

- Be aware of the importance of personal relationships in conducting partnership activities.
- Building credibility and trust with your partners and with their supervisors/administration is key. Some ways of doing this are:
  - Repeated visits by the same people (continuity);
  - Meetings between the US partnership representative and key individuals in regional and health administration, to establish a personal and professional relationship before trying to make progress on project activities.
  - Never, ever promising anything that you aren’t positive you can deliver (consider feasibility of shipping).
  - Trying to provide more than has been promised.
  - Initial trust-building with NIS partners can take more than a year.
  - Matching individuals on the NIS side with colleagues on the US side, to encourage the establishment of long-term personal and professional relationships and collaborations.

#### **Gaining Support/Trust from Administration**

- Keep administrators/supervisors/senior officials fully informed about partnership activities; ask permission to initiate specific changes. Failure to do this can create problems for those who receive training. Support from above is absolutely essential to the success of the project.
- Some partnership activities may re-order the status and power relationships within an organization, or create new centers of status and power, as you work with particular clinicians

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or administrators, give them new knowledge and expect that they use it to make changes in clinical practice. Be sensitive to the implications of these changes for peers and supervisors.

- Be sensitive to the fact that the free form, volunteer approach, which is very comfortable to Americans, can make NIS colleagues very uncomfortable.
- Partnership activities often require substantial amounts of professional time on the NIS side, and this must be negotiated with senior managers.
- Be aware that the traditional mentality is to keep information private rather than sharing it with others.
- Special consideration needs to be given to management/leadership travel.
- Involve regional and national health administrators as greatly as possible.

#### **Sensitivity to Cultural/Political Dynamics**

- The “process” for getting things done can differ greatly from your expectations. Over time the procedures for successful planning and action will become more clear.
- In the context of the NIS health care system, individuals will probably be reluctant to take the initiative, to make change or to challenge authority. Do not set unreasonable expectations. Involving senior management and officials in the process can facilitate necessary changes.
- The expectation that you will conduct an exchange, share technical information with your peers and, armed with this new knowledge, they will make the necessary changes is most likely not realistic.
- Learning styles in the NIS are different from those in the US: Your NIS colleagues will most likely not be as data driven as Americans. They are used to learning in a much more formal setting than we might expect – lectures, rather than seminars or hallway conversations. This means that US volunteers should consider very carefully what information they plan to impart, how to provide it and how to recommend it be implemented (especially if it contradicts current regulations). Many NIS clinicians have been effectively cut off from Western medical literature for over fifty years and accepting some of your clinical assumptions may not be automatic or easy for them. In these situations, US volunteers should be especially sensitive to the philosophy of the partnership program (peer-to-peer relationships rather than teacher-student).

#### **Establishing/Maintaining Communication**

- Establishing and maintaining communication will be a constant job, complicated by busy schedules, language barriers, and computer problems.
- Regular, weekly and even daily communication by e-mail can help a great deal.
- Even with the best intentions and greatest efforts, small and large misunderstandings can occur that require time to sort out. More communication is always better than less communication.
- Maintain good and regular communication, not only with NIS partners, but among US volunteers and institutions, and with AIHA.

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### BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCED AIHA PARTNERS

#### **Community Support**

- *Building support for/involvement in partnership activities in your home community*
- *Disseminating information on partner activities through the media or other forums*
- *Motivating volunteers to participate in the partnership program*
- *Maintaining continuity over time with the participation of different volunteers*

#### **Maintaining Continuity with Volunteers:**

- Managing a volunteer project is more complex than might be anticipated. While this approach is rich in resources, it can be complicated to administer. Project administration (the role of the partnership representative) is a critical function in order to operate the project at a maximum level, while minimize the burdens for volunteers.
- Maintaining continuity, while avoiding burnout among the volunteers can be a challenge. On the other hand, it is sometimes challenging to maintain a balance among many interested volunteers and/or hospitals who want to participate and minimizing the necessity of orienting entirely new delegations to the project's goals, objectives and the cultural context within which they will be working. In the case of a multi-institutional project, effective planning and the organization of hospitals into groups, each responsible for a particular goal, might be a useful strategy.
- It is very important for the volunteer participants to meet on a regular basis to stay on target especially if you have multiple initiatives going on within your partnership at the same time.
- It can be easy to find volunteers to travel, but much more difficult to find those who will take time to prepare, do the work necessary to make a trip productive and to do the required follow-up once home.
- A dedicated core group will provide continuity. Establishing stable teams, with US and NIS participants, for each goal is an effective way to work.

#### **Building Community Support/Involvement**

- In the past, partners have held dinners and special events on an annual or semiannual basis, where they review partnership activities and accomplishments.
- Certain community groups identify with participants and will be willing to support partnership activities in one way or another: For instance: local ethnic communities with ties to your partners' country, professional associations, etc. Local ethnic communities with ties to your partners' country can be especially helpful in terms of homestays and reasonably priced or even free interpretation.

#### **Dissemination/Publicity**

- Partners have actively publicized their activities in the media with great results, such as news programs or documentaries focusing on partnership relationships and achievements.
- Involvement of television and print media serves both the health/dissemination and the public relations needs of the project.
- Some partners have had opportunities to present partnership activities/achievements at lectures or special events, particularly those sponsored by local ethnic communities. This type of presentation often led to financial or in-kind support from the community.

**BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED  
FROM EXPERIENCED AIHA PARTNERS**

**Institutional Support**

- *Importance of Institutional Support*
- *Gaining and maintaining institutional support for partnership activities*
- *Balancing involvement in partnership activities with other responsibilities*

**Importance of Institutional Support**

- Broad hospital support, from the Board on down, greatly facilitates recruitment and maintenance of program volunteers, and ensures that the partnership representative will be able to devote sufficient time to the project.

**Gaining and Maintaining Support**

- Visits by senior management to the NIS partner can bolster interest and support, and make it easier to get US hospitals to spend time or money on projects..
- Involving the community in projects, so the institution can receive community recognition helps sustain organizational support.
- When new administrators come on the scene, it is necessary to orient them to the partnership activities, the place of the institution in the partnership and how partnership activities – including released time for faculty and staff to participate – are also beneficial to US institutions.
- Institutional support has to be negotiated at the time the grant is accepted and as in any negotiations there have to be convincing arguments as to the value of the program for the institution e.g. favorable publicity and doctors and nurses who return to their work with a new outlook on the US health care system.
- On the NIS side, administrative support is also key. See “Partner Relationship” above, “Gaining Trust/Support from Administration.”

**Balancing Partnership Activities with Other Responsibilities**

- Coordinating partnership activities is a significant time commitment. Most have found that at least during partnership exchanges to the US it is a full time job. Even between exchanges, it absorbs more time than one might expect.
- Organizing a "team" that collaborates with the project coordinator and meets regularly and delegates out some of the program responsibilities is a good means of preventing the partnership to become a time burden and will help to make it more fruitful though the involvement of many.

**BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED  
FROM EXPERIENCED AIHA PARTNERS**

**Program Development**

- *Developing realistic, appropriate and collaborative goals*
- *Disseminating partnership achievements*
- *Building sustainability into workplans*

**Developing Realistic, Appropriate and Collaborative Goals**

- Keys to success:
  - Mutually establish realistic goals; the clearer the goals, the more successful the activity. Both the overall goals, and the sub-goals should be targeted and clearly defined and should correspond to local needs and opportunities;
  - Evaluate and adjust workplans over time. This flexibility is necessary to assure partners don't develop a sense of failure;
  - Plan for ongoing communication with all levels of system – providers, politicians, city, oblast and federal health agencies and medical institutions;
  - Integrate service delivery changes and innovations into existing system;
  - Test model by replicating at other sites.
- Initial goals, objectives, and timelines are often too ambitious, especially within the context of the limited resources (in terms of money, equipment and personnel capabilities) devoted to healthcare in the NIS. Over ambitious planning can lead to frustration when goals are not met or when plans have to be revised. However, realistic goals can only be established after partners have worked together and gained a mutual and comprehensive understanding of their goals and capabilities.
- Important to get real input from the NIS partner as to their areas needs and that both partners have a realistic understanding of the amount of resources and time available. Coordinator must keep abreast of conditions in partner institutions by observation so as to be able to find appropriate individuals and sources to accomplish partnership goals.
- Ensuring real commitment to implementation of partnership goals can be difficult. In the past, verbal expression of agreement did not always indicate true commitment.
- Be aware that concepts such as team building, consensus-based decision making, and critically evaluating the implementation process may not be familiar ways of working for your partners.

**Disseminating Partnership Achievements**

- It was important to involve health administration, up to the Ministry level if possible, in partnership projects. This type of involvement greatly promotes dissemination, not only throughout the medical community, but also to lay persons by way of television.
- Adopting a train-the-trainer approach increases the numbers impacted on both sides in an exponential fashion.

**BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED  
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**Building Sustainability into Workplans**

- For sustainability, it is key that the workplan has the support of all levels of administration. Plan for ongoing communication with all levels of system – providers, politicians, city, oblast and federal health agencies and medical institutions.
- Integrate partnership changes and innovations into existing system; test model by replicating at other sites.
- The establishment of professional associations as NGOs (especially nursing associations) can lead to considerable empowerment of NIS colleagues to support and disseminate changes.
- Because many times partnership changes and pilot programs require a change in managerial style, management training has sometimes been very important in ensuring sustainability of partnership initiatives.

**BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED  
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**Program Implementation**

- *Planning successful exchange trips*
- *Taking into account the ways in which timing, length of visits, number of participants, and composition of delegations affect the outcome of the exchange.*
- *Orienting volunteers prior to exchange trips*

**Planning Successful Exchanges (Determining timing, length of visits, number/ composition of delegation):**

- Carefully consider the goals and the workplan for each visit to determine the number and type of personnel needed as well as the length of time required to plan for the visit. Goals for each visit and expected outcomes should be defined in the letter of invitation. Make sure that travelers on both sides are familiar with the goals of the program and the plans for the trip. Meet prior to the trip, and share past trip reports as well as information about the program and the conditions travelers can expect. NIS partners should do the same.
- The length of time needed for a successful exchange can vary by partnership and according to the objectives of the trip. Many partnerships have found that the NIS partners coming to the US benefit from a slightly longer trip than US visitors there. AIHA recommends a minimum of seven days per trip.
- Be sure to know (and inform NIS partners of) the background of each traveler prior to exchanges.
- Timelines set with goals and objectives may have to be revised, but they are useful in maintaining order and continuity.
- Check calendars carefully and avoid scheduling any conferences, meetings, etc. over national holidays.

**Orienting Volunteers:**

- All travelers should be oriented to AIHA, USAID and their respective missions. The US partnership representative should meet with all pending delegations for a debriefing before and post-travel. The NIS partnership representative should do the same on that side.
- Individuals who had previously been to the NIS partner country are helpful in orienting new volunteers.
- Give report forms to participants at beginning of trip so they can become familiar with desired information and make notes as the exchange progresses.
- Provide background on travelers, partnership history and goals, exchange goals and schedule to both sides significantly in advance of the visit, and try to identify and contact the next exchange visitor no later than the time of the preceding exchange visit in the opposite direction.
- Keep a running "orientation" list of do's and don'ts for new volunteers that are specific to your hospital partner, the city, city where you lay over, programs, etc.
- Encourage travelers to be realistic in what you can accomplish. Be prepared for initiations to take twice the amount of time you expected.
- Sending at least one return traveler each trip dramatically improves trip quality and productivity.
- Orientation should include the cultural importance of the social aspects of the relationship as part of trust building.

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#### Logistics

- *Traveling in the NIS*
- *Logistical Role of the Partnership Coordinator*
- *Balancing partnership work with social and cultural activities*
- *Planning*

#### **Traveling in the NIS:**

- Transiting through an NIS city can be complicated. In their home cities, AIHA regional offices can facilitate airport pick-up and other needs, such as interpretation, for delegations in transit.
- Be aware that regulations, especially in customs, are unpredictable and subject to rapid change.
- Review what you are allowed to take in and out of the country. Don't hassle customs, it isn't worth it!
- Packing Tips:
  - Try to pack all supplies in suitcases or duffle bags (with heavy duty locking straps secured around the suitcase) that will fit through the airport X-ray machines, rather than in boxes. Suitcases are much easier to reseal if customs officials decided to make you open them. The heavy duty strap is to help impede "curious" baggage handlers.
  - Maintain and update a packing list as conditions change. Take minimal clothes, especially if you want to leave room for instruments, supplies, etc. Don't forget your suit...NIS partners tend to be more conservative in their dress and they expect conservative dress.
  - Bring business cards.

#### **Logistical Role of the Partnership Coordinator:**

- During exchanges, the partnership representative (or person designated by him/her) should keep track of logistical details, such as carrying copies of passports and visas to facilitate replacement if necessary, reconfirming flights, reconfirming meetings, etc.

#### **Balancing/Complementing Work with Cultural Activities/Friendship/Hospitality:**

- Official visits and gifts are important in the NIS. Some partners have tried, in light of the financial situation in the NIS, to help their NIS partners feel comfortable with the fact that gifts are not necessary; hospitality and friendship is the greatest gift.
- Understanding the cultural importance of friendship and its impact on professional work helps promote a solid working relationships – plus it's much more rewarding.
- Your partners will take their hospitality seriously, and are likely to entertain you in their homes with ten-course meals.
- Include some social/cultural events during visits to the US.

#### **Planning:**

- Email is a very helpful tool.
- Travel plans are always susceptible to logistical problems, whether traveling internationally or across town. But we have learned to anticipate as many alternatives as we can.

**BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED  
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**Financial Issues**

- *Making the most of your partnership budget*
- *Leveraging your partnership subgrant with in-kind contributions*

**Making the Most of Your Budget:**

Lodging:

- Some partners save money by having visitors stay in their homes. This is a great way to save money and build lasting personal relationships. Others have found it more advantageous on both sides to be able to come back to a hotel, as a delegation to discuss each day and plan.
- Some partners have a patient/family hospitality house at our hospital which they can use for housing partners at a minimal cost. Others have furnished apartments at or near partnership institutions, which have proven less expensive than exorbitant local hotels.

Meals and Incidentals:

- Partnerships are free to provide per diem to travelers. However, some have found they can save money by simply covering the costs of meals and transportation, as the actual costs are in certain cases less than the allowable per diem.

Transportation:

- There are certain lower-cost months for travel to the NIS. Some partners have had the flexibility to travel during these months and save money on cheaper airfares.

**Leveraging Your Partnership Subgrant with In-Kind Contributions:**

- Many partners have received significant corporate and/or charitable contributions
- Many partners have collaborated with the US Departments of State and Defense in providing medical supplies and equipment to their Partner institutions and others.
- It is important to help your NIS partners seek independent funding sources whenever possible.
- It is sometimes relatively easy to get donations, but much more difficult to transport them to the NIS and ensure that they are appropriately distributed and used.

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**Inter-Partnership Activities**

- *Interacting with other AIHA partners (as a means of enhancing your partnership activities and outcomes)*
- Partners have found interpartnership meetings (annual conferences, workshops, etc.) to be very helpful in sharing and disseminating achievements. Some partners have actively communicated via phone and email with other AIHA partners.

**Guidelines for a Successful Partnership Exchange  
For US Partners**

Exchanges are the core of AIHA partnership activities. Successful exchanges ensure not only the transfer of needed information and skills, they also cement the development of ongoing peer-to-peer relationships, which can have unforeseen and immeasurable benefits for both US and NIS partners. The following guidelines were compiled from surveys of past and current partnership representatives (PR). They have been designed to allow PRs to check off tasks as they plan an exchange. Although these guidelines have been provided in the context of planning individual exchanges, they may also be used to promote ongoing evaluation of the partnership's objectives, as well as facilitating communications between the partners, helping to ensure the partnership's overall success.

**Guidelines for a Successful Partnership Exchange  
For US Partners**

**TRAVEL FROM US TO NIS**

**More than Six weeks Prior to the Exchange**

- ❑ Review the partnership workplan and the particular goals of the upcoming exchange, considering the accomplishments and obstacles faced by previous exchanges (use past trip reports to evaluate).
- ❑ If trip objectives change from those described in the workplan, inform the AIHA Program Analyst/Associate.
- ❑ In light of these objectives, determine the dates of travel, in conjunction with the NIS partner.
  - Keep in mind that AIHA requires at least five business days on-site per trip & recommends a minimum of seven (although trip length will depend partly on the nature of the objectives).
  - Check calendars and avoid scheduling any exchanges, conferences, etc., over national holidays, unless there are no objections from either partner.
- ❑ Working with the NIS partner, select travelers and determine the local participants they will work with in the destination city.
  - Make sure that selected travelers have valid international passports, or will have time to obtain them before the departure date.
  - Both US and NIS partnership representatives should know the professional background of all exchange participants, and share this information with travelers and local participants before the exchange, if possible.
- ❑ Distribute to each traveler the following forms, and establish a deadline for their return:
  - Part 2 of AIHA Exchange Confirmation Forms: *Personal Data*
  - Part 2 of Omega's Travel Forms: *Travel Data*
  - Visa application & instructions
- ❑ Forward to the NIS partnership representative the names of all travelers, dates of travel and objectives of the exchange in order to receive letters of invitation.

***Suggestions:***

- Experienced partners have found that sending at least one return traveler each trip improves productivity.

**45 Days Prior to Travel**

- ❑ Submit to AIHA:
  - *Exchange Confirmation Form*
  - *Personal Data Forms*
  - *Request for Sub-Agreement Advance to Partnership Institutions*, if additional funds are required for the exchange
- ❑ Submit to Omega Travel:
  - *Travel Data Forms*
  - Visa Applications & letter of invitation

**14-45 Days Prior to Travel**

- ❑ Develop day-to-day agenda with the NIS partner.
  - Send preliminary copies of agenda to travelers.

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## Guidelines for a Successful Partnership Exchange For US Partners

- ❑ Give travelers a copy of *Tips for Travel to the NIS* and the appropriate country description.
- ❑ Correspond with NIS partnership representative to ensure that the appropriate audio-visual equipment will be available for training sessions and presentations. Bring alternative means for presentations -- e.g., if an LCD projector is not available, have overheads or poster boards ready instead.
- ❑ Send materials for training sessions or presentations ahead of time to the NIS partnership representative, so that translators will have time to acquaint themselves with the appropriate terminology.
- ❑ Inform your PA, using the Excess Baggage Manifest form, and the NIS partnership representative if travelers will have excess baggage, so that transportation in the NIS can be organized accordingly.

### **14 Days Prior to Travel**

- ❑ Submit *Excess Bags Manifest* to AIHA to pre-pay for excess luggage for partnership-related materials.

### **7 to 14 Days Prior to Travel**

- ❑ Meet with travelers for a briefing before departure.
  - Include individuals who had previously participated in partnership exchanges in the orientation of new volunteers.
  - Orient travelers to AIHA and the appropriate USAID mission.
  - Review the partnership history and workplan, as well as specific objectives and agenda of this exchange.
  - Review reporting expectations (provide a trip report format if desired), so that participants will be able to report on trip accomplishments and other elements, which will have to be incorporated into the partnership's quarterly progress reports submitted to AIHA.
  - Share past *Trip Reports*.
  - Review any relevant logistical details with travelers, such as local transportation, cultural events, etc.
- ❑ If the US partnership representative is not traveling, assign someone (preferable a veteran participant) as the trip leader to be responsible for:
  - Ensuring that trip objectives are being met.
  - Keeping track of all logistical details, including copies of passports, visas and ticket itineraries.
  - Carrying emergency contact information for all travelers.
  - Filing *Trip Report*.

### **Suggestions:**

- Keep a running "orientation" list of the do's and don'ts that are specific to your NIS partner, the NIS city, cities for forced overnights, etc.
- Encourage volunteers to be realistic in what they can accomplish and to be prepared for activities to take longer than expected.

### **During the Exchange**

- ❑ Hold a meeting at the beginning of the exchange of both US & NIS partners to discuss objectives and the planned agenda.
  - Ask travelers to submit visas to NIS partnership representative for registration.

**Guidelines for a Successful Partnership Exchange  
For US Partners**

- Meet with partners at the end of the exchange to discuss trip objectives, achievements, and future plans.
  - Does the workplan continue to reflect the needs of the NIS partner?
  - Discuss future exchanges with the NIS partner and, if possible, identify and meet with future participants of exchanges to the US.
- Allocate time to work on trip reports towards the end of the trip, if possible.
- Check at the end of each trip that all activities/expenses not listed in the pre-approved budget have been paid – e.g., private bills, impromptu events, telephone bills, etc.

***Suggestions:***

- Arrange brief meetings either between the US & NIS partners, or just the US travelers at the end of each days to ensure that the trip is on track and participants have a chance to address any changes in the agenda.

**After the Trip Concludes**

- Meet shortly after travelers return to the US to review trip achievements and issues, if any.
  - Assess if the workplan continues to reflect the needs of the partnership.
  - Start planning the next trip.
  - Collect *Trip Report* from trip leader and review to ensure accomplishments, obstacles and any data collected are captured.
  - Incorporate the trip report into the quarterly progress report sent to AIHA.

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## Guidelines for a Successful Partnership Exchange For US Partners

### TRAVEL FROM THE NIS TO US

#### **More than Six weeks Prior to the Exchange**

- ❑ Review the partnership workplan and the particular objectives of the upcoming exchange, considering the accomplishments and obstacles faced in previous exchanges (use past trip reports to evaluate).
- ❑ If trip objectives have changed from those described in the workplan, inform the AIHA Program Analyst/Associate.
- ❑ In light of these objectives, determine the dates of travel in collaboration with the NIS partner.
  - AIHA recommends a minimum of ten days for trips from the NIS to the US. Typically, most trips to the US last two weeks. However, trips to the US can be longer, depending on the nature of the objectives.
  - Check calendars and avoid scheduling any exchanges, conferences, etc., over national holidays, unless there are no objections from both partners.
- ❑ Working with the NIS partner, select travelers and determine the local participants they will work with in the destination city.
  - Make sure that selected travelers have valid international passports, or that they will have time to obtain an international passport before the partnership date.
  - Both US and NIS partnership representatives should know the professional background of all exchange participants, and this information should be shared with travelers and local participants, before the exchange if possible.
- ❑ Distribute to each traveler the following forms, and establish a deadline for their return:
  - Part 2 of AIHA Exchange Confirmation Forms: *Personal Data*
  - Part 2 of Omega's Travel Forms: *Travel Data*
  - Visa applications & instructions
- ❑ Send to the NIS partnership representative a letter of invitation containing the names of all travelers, dates of travel and the goals of the exchange.

#### **45 Days Prior to Travel**

- ❑ Submit to AIHA:
  - *Exchange Confirmation Form*
  - *Personal Data Forms*
  - *Request for Sub-Agreement Advance to Partnership Institutions*, if additional funds are required for the exchange
- ❑ Submit to Omega Travel:
  - *Travel Data Forms*
  - Visa Applications & letter of invitation

#### **14-45 Days Prior to Travel**

- ❑ Develop a schedule with details of each day's activities.
  - Send out preliminary copies to travelers and local participants.
  - Make sure copies of the schedule are available in English and Russian.

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## Guidelines for a Successful Partnership Exchange For US Partners

- ❑ Prepare a packet of any information to be distributed to NIS travelers. This will allow time for any necessary materials to be translated, if the NIS partners do not speak English. Past partners have included the following in their packets:
  - Maps of your city or state, hospital and/or campus
  - Patient Bill of Rights
  - A welcome letter from the head of the US Partner Institution
  - Confidentiality policy
  - Information about the US partner institution
  - Pertinent phone numbers, including US partner representative's and translators' office and home numbers, pagers, etc.
  - Exchange agenda
  - Note pad & pen to take notes
  - Tax forms to fill out

### ***Suggestions:***

- Give information on the trip and any materials to be presented to translators in advance, so that they can acquaint themselves with the appropriate terminology.

### **7 to 14 Days Prior to Travel**

- ❑ Meet with local participants for a briefing before travelers arrive.
  - Include individuals who had previously participated in partnership exchanges.
  - Orient local participants to AIHA.
  - Review the partnership history and workplan and the particular objectives and agenda of this exchange.
  - Share relevant past trip reports.
  - Inform participants of the professional backgrounds of the NIS travelers.
  - Review any relevant logistical details, such as local transportation, cultural events, home stays, etc.
- ❑ Prepare a memo for distribution within the institutions that NIS partners will visit, so that all staff are aware that a delegation is coming. This will help in finding travelers, if any travelers are "lost" within the facility, as well as ensuring that none of the institution's departments have "surprise visitors."
- ❑ If the NIS partnership representative is not traveling, ask the representative to identify a trip leader who will be responsible for:
  - Ensuring that trip objectives are being met.
  - Serving as main spokesperson for NIS team.

### **During the exchange**

- ❑ Hold a meeting at the beginning of the exchange to discuss objectives and the planned agenda.
  - Distribute orientation packets.
  - Inform travelers about typical professional attire in the institutions they will be visiting.
- ❑ Ensure that all personal expenses on hotel bills are paid separately by the NIS partner travelers prior to departure.
- ❑ At the end of the exchange, partners should meet to discuss trip objectives and achievements, as well as future plans. This is an opportunity for US partners to get information and feedback which can be incorporated into a trip report.

**Guidelines for a Successful Partnership Exchange  
For US Partners**

***Suggestions:***

- Past US partners have loaned/given their NIS partners scrubs or lab coats, so that they feel more comfortable in a clinical setting.
- Assign beepers to the NIS partners for the visits to hospitals and other large institutions to enable the US partnership representative to easily locate NIS partners in the event that the day's schedule changes unexpectedly.
- Brief meetings at the end of each day ensure that the trip is on track and give participants a chance to address any changes in the agenda.
- Although some cultural events should be planned during the exchange, visitors should also be given some personal time to explore or just catch their breath.

**After the Trip Concludes**

- ❑ Review trip report to ensure that trip accomplishments and obstacles are captured, and incorporate trip report information into Quarterly Progress Reports submitted to AIHA.
- ❑ Start planning next trip.



# Travel tips for the NIS

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Your visit to the New Independent States (NIS) will, we hope, be extremely rewarding; it will also be challenging. To help you prepare this section offers a few tips. Another good source of information is your colleagues who have recently visited the NIS and experienced much of what you will. Please note though that the NIS includes 14 richly diverse countries and that these guidelines are general.

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## WHAT TO BRING

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The best tip to keep in mind is to travel light. If at all possible, pack everything in a carry-on bag, and if this is impractical, at least pack a change of clothes and other essentials in your carry-on luggage in case other bags arrive late or are lost.

In general, seasoned NIS travelers advise bringing as little luggage as possible. The reduced weight will prevent a lot of stress and strain. (Porters are not readily available in most NIS airports.)

## ***MEDICATIONS AND VACCINATIONS***

In the areas where NIS partner institutions are located, there are no formal immunization requirements for travelers. However, certain basic medications and vaccinations are strongly recommended.

- ◆ Basic medications—Pepto-Bismol, Tylenol, Immodium AD, Dramamine, antibiotics and cold medicine. Vitamins are also a good precaution, especially for vegetarians and other people with special diets. Travelers should bring all prescription medicines required for the duration of the trip.
- ◆ The Centers for Disease Control recommends travelers receive the following vaccines 4 to 6 weeks prior to travel to ensure maximum effectiveness:
  1. Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG)
  2. Hepatitis B: a series of three shots over a six-month period
  3. Typhoid: Please note this vaccine is not 100% effective. Drinking water should still be treated.
  4. Polio
  5. Meningococcal: Optional - a one-time vaccine against Meningitis.

For the medications that you bring, remember to 1) pack them in your carry-on luggage, 2) keep them in their original, labeled containers, and 3) keep any written prescriptions from your physician with the prescribed medications.

## ***CLOTHING***

- ◆ Although you may have working meetings every day and dinner out most nights, your wardrobe need not be extensive. At the hospitals, dress as you would at your American workplace, keeping in mind the climate (see Table 4.1 below).
- ◆ You may find that your NIS colleagues tend to dress more formally, especially for special functions, than you are accustomed to. Men should bring a coat and tie, and women the equivalent. Bring comfortable clothes and shoes to relax and travel in as well.
- ◆ Winter and Spring travelers to Russia, Ukraine and Moldova may also want to bring good snow shoes or hiking boots. The sidewalks are often very slippery and/or slushy.

## ***OTHER ITEMS***

There are a few other essential items that you should remember to bring:

- ◆ Make a copy of your visa and the photo page of your passport to have with you in case your original documents are lost. Keep these copies in your luggage separate from the actual passport.
- ◆ Several small packages of Kleenex and/or wet wipes. (Hotels and restaurants usually have toilet paper, but public bathrooms rarely do and it's always a good idea to have something with you.)
- ◆ Women should bring their own supply of sanitary napkins and/or tampons.
- ◆ Basic toiletries. Pack enough to last the entire trip, since you may not always be able to find the brands you prefer.
- ◆ Due to limited laundry and dry cleaning facilities, you may want to bring a small bottle of Woolite. If possible, limit your wardrobe to wash and wear items.
- ◆ If you bring a hair dryer or an electric razor, you must bring an adapter and converter for 220v, European outlets.
- ◆ A money belt.
- ◆ Swiss army knife. Remember to pack it in your luggage and not in your carry on, since airlines have been prohibiting passengers from carrying hazardous items on board.
- ◆ It is difficult in most NIS countries to cash travelers checks, and impossible in the Central Asian Republics. Dollars should be brought in small denominations of \$50s, \$20s and \$10s. Bills should be new and with no ink stains or tears. Damaged bills will not be accepted. A supply of 10 or 20 new \$1 bills is helpful, especially in transit for tips and souvenir shopping.
- ◆ Small gifts. Take mementos that are unique to the US, your state, city or institution such as calendars, postcards, T-shirts, special foods, etc. In addition small portable medical items

such as stethoscopes and lab coats make good gifts, as do any promotional items from your hospital, such as notepads, pens, etc.

- ◆ Photos of your family, friends, workplace, home etc. Your NIS partners will want to get to know you not just as a professional colleague but as a friend. An excellent means of getting to know one another and to develop trust is to share pictures of your friends and family over a cup of tea.
- ◆ Snacks. Due to busy schedules and difficulty finding quick meals, you may want to bring trail mix, granola bars, peanut butter, instant oatmeal or soup, etc. Also, consider bringing foods you have a particular preference for, such as decaf coffee. Coffee drinkers should bring their own creamer.
- ◆ Bottled water is always best, even when the locals tell you otherwise. However, if you do choose to drink the water make sure it has been boiled for at least 10 minutes. A small heating coil comes in handy. Remember that any electrical appliances will require an adapter and a converter.
- ◆ Small camera with film. Film is cheaper in the NIS, but you may not always have the time to pick up a couple of rolls.
- ◆ Business cards.
- ◆ A small flashlight. Many cities are not well lit at night, and you will find it useful walking around.
- ◆ Small bottle of antibacterial hand jelly, for the occasions when you may not have a chance to wash your hands.
- ◆ A towel. If you are not staying in an expensive hotel, you may only be provided with hand towels.

Table 4.1: Estimated Temperatures in Fahrenheit in the NIS

	<b>Dec – Feb</b>	<b>Mar – May</b>	<b>Jun – Aug</b>	<b>Sep – Nov</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	15-38	30-76 (wet)	57-92 (humid)	60-92
<b>Georgia</b>	30-48	3~75	61-87	41-78
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	5-24	17-76	61-90	23-74
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	3-48	4-84	46-93	~86
<b>Russia-Moscow</b>	3-24	16-66	51-85	26-61
<b>Russia-St. Petersburg</b>	8-26	18-59	51-69	28-60
<b>Russia-Murmansk</b>	0-32	11-38	41-51	0-35
<b>Ukraine/Moldova</b>	Frozen	up to 68	Up to 68	~40
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	21-44	37-78	60-92	35-80

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## Getting There

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### **American Airports**

- ◆ You may check up to two bags. Checked baggage may not exceed 70 pounds or 62 inches in total dimension. A third item can be carried on the plane with you. Carry-on items must fit either below the seat or in an overhead compartment. Contact your partnership representative if you have extra baggage. Extra baggage can be pre-paid if prior notice is given.
- ◆ Be at the airport at least three hours in advance if you have extra baggage. In the NIS you should report to the airport two hours before your flight to clear customs, and fill out any necessary paper work.
- ◆ Legible address labels should be included on the inside and outside of all luggage and boxes to help prevent them getting lost.
- ◆ Since lost luggage is not uncommon, you should carry all essential items and a change of clothes with you. This would include important medications and/or any instruments you require for the clinical work you will do while in the NIS

### **NIS airports**

- ◆ Once in the NIS airport, you will go through passport control and then to a baggage claim area. If needed, you should look for a baggage cart as soon as you get out of passport control since they are often hard to find.
- ◆ If you are carrying medical supplies or drugs for donation, you should keep an itemized list of what you are bringing. Any pharmaceuticals which will expire in 6 months or less will be confiscated. Each NIS country has specific customs requirements regarding donated materials. Contact a Program Analyst at AIHA at least a month before you travel in order to determine the requirements for anything you plan to carry.

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## While Staying in the NIS

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### **FOOD AND DRINK**

The type, quality, and availability of food varies greatly from country to country and from region to region, affected by local habits,

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Box 4.1: Food

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English	Russian	Phonetic Translation
Menu	Меню	Men-yu
Waiter	Официант	a-fits-l-yant
Waitress	Официантка	a-fits-yant-ka
Another / more	Еще	ee-sho'
That's all / I'm done	Все	Vsyo
Hot	Горячий	Gar-ya-chi
Cold	Холодный	Ha-lode'-niy
Breakfast	Завтрак	Zawf'-truk
Lunch	Обед	Ab-yed'
Dinner	Ужин	Oo'-jin

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season and trade conditions. Your hotel and NIS hosts are the best sources of information on meals. In fact, your hosts will likely arrange many of your meals, including glorious banquets that will last for hours. Here are some additional hints:

- ◆ Do not drink untreated tap water, including ice. It is advised not to even brush your teeth with it. Bottled water is available in most stores or street-side stands.
- ◆ Bring one or two bottles of water with you. This will enable you to brush your teeth and have a drink of water after you've arrived in the NIS and before you've had a chance to go to a store.
- ◆ The local bottled mineral water is safe to drink, although you should be wary of counterfeit bottles. It also has a distinct taste, due to its very high salt and mineral content. It is believed to have medicinal qualities. You may want to give it a try.
- ◆ Fruits and vegetables that will be peeled, with the exception of bananas, should first be washed in soapy, treated water. Other fruits and vegetables should be soaked in a chlorine or iodine solution for 15 minutes. (one iodine tablet per quart of water; one teaspoon of chlorine per gallon of water.)
- ◆ Iodine tablets can be found in most camping or general stores.
- ◆ Travelers should always be wary of dairy products, since most are unpasteurized. In the summer months spoilage is quite common due to lack of proper refrigeration.
- ◆ Much of the food you will be served will be high in salt and cholesterol. There is no non-fat milk. If you anticipate a problem, you may wish to bring more snacks and supplementary food.
- ◆ If you enjoy eating out have someone you trust, preferably a local resident, take you to a local restaurant. There are excellent places to eat, but they can be difficult to find.
- ◆ The NIS citizens are famous for their consumption of alcohol. They are proud of their vodka, wine, cognac, and champagne and will undoubtedly encourage you to try them. If you do plan to drink at a dinner or celebration, start slowly! Many in the NIS are proud of their tradition of toasts, as a means of facilitating good will between the diners. Usually, every 15-20 minutes they offer a toast, and one dinner may easily have as many as 7 to 15.
- ◆ If you choose not to drink during your visit decide this beforehand, and make no exceptions to your rule. Informing your hosts early of an allergy or religious objections to drinking or eating meat, so as to help avoid awkwardness later.
- ◆ **Don't let this section discourage you from trying many of the local specialties. The national dishes of each of the NIS countries are unique and delicious.**

## LANGUAGE

It is difficult to generalize about language skills in the NIS, with three exceptions:

English	Russian	Phonetic Translation
Hello	Здравствуйте	Zdrawst'vweet-ye
Good bye	До свидания	Da-svee-dan'-ye
Good luck to you!	Счастливо	Chaws-lee'-va
My name is...	Меня зовут	Men-ya' sa-voot'
Good/excellent	Хорошо	Ha-ra-sho'
How do you say...	Как вы говорите	Kak vwee ga-va-reet'-ye
Excuse me	Извините	Iz-va-neet'-ye
Where is the...	Где находится	Gdye na-hode'-eet-sa
Airport	Аэропорт	Air-a-port
Embassy	Посольство	Pa-sol'-styа
Hospital	Больница	Ball-nee'-tsa
Pharmacy	Аптека	Apa-tye-ka
Restaurant	Ресторан	Res-toe-rawn'
Taxi	Такси	Tack-see'
Where can I buy...	Где я могу купить	Gdye-ya magoo' koop-eet
I need	Мне нужно	Men-ye nooj'-na
I need help	Мне нужна помощь	Men-ye nooj'-na po'-mush
Where are we?	Где мы	Gdye mwee?
Stop here	Остановите здесь	Aw-stan'-a-veet'-ye zdyace
Please wait	Подождите пожалуйста	Pa-duj-deet'-ye pa-jawl' sta
How much does it cost?	Сколько это стоит	Skole'-ka et'-a stow'-eet?

- ◆ Russian is understood throughout the NIS; however, in some countries other languages have been designated as the official, and therefore preferred, language.
- ◆ English is not widely spoken (AIHA and your hosts will arrange interpreters). Communication may be less difficult than you anticipate: you will likely discover universal "languages" based on your common mission as health-care professionals.

Boxes 4.14.3 provide you with some of the more useful Russian words with their pronunciation.

## SHOPPING

Should you get the chance to do any shopping, please keep in mind the following:

- ◆ In some stores, you must first get in a line to order what you want and they will tell you how much it costs or give you a ticket. Then, you must get in the cashier line to pay for it and get a receipt. Finally, you must go back to the first line and pick up what you've paid for. NIS citizens have learned to shorten the tedious process of shopping by getting into several lines at once. Therefore, you may be asked to hold someone else's place in line.
- ◆ Many of the larger hotels in the major capitals will have shops where Western goods are available, including various snack items, toiletries, and bottled water; although, their prices are generally higher than other local shops. Some stores accept American credit cards, although you shouldn't rely on them.
- ◆ The central squares in big cities usually have department stores.
- ◆ Many NIS countries have regulations as to what may leave the country. Russia for example prohibits export of items such as old books, samovars and icons. If you wish to purchase any valuable items such as rugs or expensive jewelry you will have to obtain clearance and pay duty to customs officials. Some items for export must be registered in the Ministry of Culture several days in advance.

## MAKING A PHONE CALL

- ◆ It is difficult to use phones in the NIS, and it is even more difficult to place international calls. Pay phones

### Box 4.3 ATT Direct Access

Codes	
Armenia	0-800-54-288
Belarus	8-800101
Georgia	8 0288
Kazakhstan	8-800-121-4321
Russia	755-5042
Russia St. Petersburg	325-5042
Russia Outside St. Petersburg	8812-325-5042
Russia Outside Moscow	8-095-755-5042
Ukraine	8-100-11
Uzbekistan	8-661-744-050

often do not work and the majority do not provide international service. In Russia, a metro token or special ticket is required, and these are only available in metro stations and kiosks in some cities.

AT&T offers international access lines in most countries (See Box 4.3). These lines are considerably cheaper than those provided by local phone companies, and the transmission quality is often better.

Most hotels also allow guests to buy time for international calls, and there are stores that specialize in phone calls.

### **GETTING AROUND**

- ◆ To travel around the city, a wide variety of public transportation is available. Most cities have a system of buses, trolleybuses, and electric rails that you can use.
- ◆ Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tashkent, Kiev, Almaty, Minsk, Bishkek, Tbilisi and Yerevan have subway systems.
- ◆ Cabs are also available. When hailing a cab, you may receive ride offers from locals trying to earn extra money. This can be dangerous and is strongly discouraged. Before getting into a cab it is always wiser to agree on the destination and the price. If you do not the fare may be considerably higher.

### **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

- ◆ American women should not be surprised if they are treated differently than their male counterparts. Many citizens of the NIS follow the same cultural protocols as do Europeans. For example, male NIS colleagues may offer to carry heavy bags for a woman, help her getting out of a bus or car, as well as assisting her to put on her coat. Also, in mixed groups, NIS men will typically address the males in the group with a handshake. In many countries it is not traditional to shake hands with women, though there are sometimes different standards for foreign women.
- ◆ Smoking is quite prevalent in the NIS. Non-smoking sections are rarely available.
- ◆ One of the greatest extensions of hospitality is when someone invites you into their home. Guests have a special status in the NIS. There is a saying in Turkmenistan for example that a guest is more honored than a grandfather. So don't be surprised if you receive the red carpet treatment. Expect to sit and do nothing while you're there. You should sit next to the host. Your host will probably put out enough food for twenty people and continually ask you to eat all of it. This isn't a serious request, of course, it's just an attempt to be as hospitable as possible.
- ◆ Don't feel you have to eat something if you don't like it. Your hosts will understand.
- ◆ Before you enter most homes you should take off your shoes in the entryway, especially if your shoes are dirty. Be sure to place them pointing inward, especially if you are in Central

Asia. It is considered bad form to do otherwise. Your host will then offer you *tapochki* or slippers.

- ◆ It is traditional (though not mandatory) to give small gifts the first time you come to someone's house. Again if you are in Central Asia, try not to give a knife or spicy food, as they are considered offensive. Good small gifts are electronic things, toiletries, picture books, clothing or American liquor. You usually can't go wrong with a present that you bought in the States.
- ◆ If you bring flowers buy an odd number. Even numbers of roses for example are considered bad luck.

### ***GIVING PRESENTATIONS***

If you have the opportunity to give a presentation or lead an informative session in the NIS, Dr. Dharmapuri Vidyasagar of the University of Illinois at Chicago offers the following tips:

- ◆ Physicians and nurses from the NIS countries are very eager to learn. Allowing for limitations in understanding English, our colleagues have excellent capabilities to understand and assimilate our lectures. Every effort should be made to provide information in a simple format or translated.
- ◆ Generally you will be assisted by a translator. The translators are very good, but may not have the medical vocabulary needed for some of the lecture material. Therefore, every effort should be made to use concise sentences in simple language. Avoid too many technical terms, and give the translator a list of more complicated medical terminology to be used beforehand if possible. Also make sure to discuss with the translator ahead of time if they will do simultaneous or consecutive translation, and give them copies of any transparencies you will use.
- ◆ We cannot stress enough the importance of discussing your lecture with the translator before you present your lecture.

*DOs:*

- ◆ Keep the lecture length to 45 minutes or less, allotting two-thirds of the time to didactic presentation and the remaining time to questions/answers and directed discussion. Allow time to explain details. Time allotted for discussion will be most useful.
- ◆ If possible, have an outline of your lecture translated before your talk for distribution.
- ◆ Include audiovisuals, slides and overheads, keeping the visuals clear and simple.
- ◆ Videotapes are best for practicum material in small groups. Incorporate small breaks at critical points to review the material presented through translation. [Bear in mind that if you are using videotapes in a presentation, that the NIS uses a different standard (PAL/SECAM). AIHA's Washington, DC office, with at least two weeks' notice, can convert

video recordings to the standard NIS format if necessary.]

- ◆ Keep in mind the potentially limited technical capabilities of NIS institutions.
- ◆ It will be much appreciated if the videos are left behind.
- ◆ Speak slowly and clearly. Remember it will take twice as long to deliver your lecture when translated. Also, speak in short phrases--translators have only so much memory.
- ◆ Ask your listeners frequently for feedback or comprehension. Talk with your colleagues during breaks.
- ◆ Respect cultural and religious beliefs of that country. Be sensitive in using examples.
- ◆ Understand the local concerns of the institution/city/country.

*DON'Ts:*

- ◆ Do not impose upon the audience your knowledge and research, but provide the needed information.
- ◆ Limit the use of technical terms, acronyms, and slang.
- ◆ Do not talk longer than 30 minutes on one topic, at a time.

***SAFETY***

Crime in the NIS has been on the rise in recent years. You should follow the same general rules as you would in any major American metropolitan center, keeping in mind that you will probably stand out as an American, which in the minds of many NIS citizens is equated with having a lot of money. While most of these tips are common sense, a few are worth emphasizing.

- ◆ In the evenings travelers should be wary of walking alone in the city.
- ◆ Don't wear any expensive jewelry. Most valuables, with the exception of your camera should be left in the States. It will not only help you keep from becoming a target, but will also avoid any complications in customs declaration forms.
- ◆ Pickpockets are not uncommon. Protect purses and bags when walking in crowded public areas.

In a medical emergency, you should contact the closest AIHA regional office as soon as possible. The emergency contact lists follow. You should also call the American International Assistance Services, Inc. (AIAS).

Inside US: 1-800-626-2427

Outside US: 0-713-267-2525 (collect)

The Group is: American International Health Alliance, Inc.

Policy # 9020060/AIAS#1550

AIHA provides each traveler with this information on an identification card, included with his or her tickets.

Also be sure to get the number of the hotel where you are staying.

In case your colleagues or relatives need to contact you while you are in the NIS, they should call AIHA in Washington, DC (202-789-1136). After hours, the AIHA beeper number is 1-800-SKY-PAGE, ID Number: 1089405. When calling the beeper, enter your telephone number with the area code after you hear the beep.

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### **Words of Wisdom from AIHA Participants**

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We hope that these and the preceding suggestions will make your trip a little smoother. Knowing what to pack and what to eat can help to make a more comfortable journey. Here are a few additional hints from AIHA participants that will further enhance your experience:

*"Be patient with the bureaucracy. There is always a system for doing things (whether it makes sense to you or not), and it is usually better to 'cooperate with the inevitable than to try to buck the system and force them to do things the 'good old American way.'*

*"Be Cautious. Not everything is as it appears. You need to know a lot about the culture before making judgments about things that trouble you. Ask lots of questions."*  
--James Jennings, University of Illinois at Chicago

*"I would tell every AIHA participant to have an open mind and a sense of humor. To get interested in the people and their culture and their history and find out what it is that enables them to function during great adversity. When we start looking, we find much to learn."*  
--Louise Redford, University of Kansas Medical Center

And finally, a quick "packing" list, compiled from other participants:

Bring a sense of humor.

Don't bring preconceptions about the New Independent States.

Be: friendly (this pays real dividends in learning and teaching), flexible, and prepared for a fascinating trip.

We congratulate you on your decision to visit and work in the New Independent States. These are beautiful, diverse, and fascinating countries. Although you may be leaving behind some conveniences and comforts, we hope your exploration and investigation of different cultures is gratifying.