



The Akaa Project's Essential Pre-trip Guide for traveling to Africa (or other developing countries)

Traveling to another country can be challenging to prepare for when you don't know what to expect. The Akaa Project has years of experience organizing volunteer trips and working with solo travelers going to Ghana, so we've compiled this all inclusive guide to help prepare you to travel.

In this guide, we will cover:

- Purchasing your ticket
- Passports and Visas
- Pre-travel medical clinic
- Travel Insurance
- Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)
- Cell Phones
- Important documents to carry with you
- The Essentials packing list

The Akaa Project is a non-profit organization working to create opportunity in the Eastern Region of Ghana. This Guide is one of our ways to share our experiences and knowledge. Learn and enjoy!

www.theakaaproject.org

Start Planning...

At least 2 months prior to departure.

A valid passport and visa application should be first on your to-do list.



Purchasing your ticket

Purchasing your ticket will mostly depend on your travel agenda (e.g. with your volunteer organization). Make sure you communicate with your in-country contact to schedule your timing. Many international flights arrive at the destination country at night, so ensure you have a plan for getting to your first destination. If you're staying at a hostel/hotel, many groups will pick you up at the airport for an additional cost.

There is no one airline that is best for international travel. While you should check out all the major airline options, also check out the airlines coming out into your arrival airport – there may be some lesser known airlines that offer good deals.

Some of the cheaper tickets also have the longest travel time, so make sure you check out the flight schedule before committing to it. For students and young travelers, we recommend you check out [Student Universe](#), they can have some great deals.

Passport/Visa

All persons traveling abroad must have a valid United States passport. Make sure you have a valid passport several months prior to departure (a passport can also be expedited with additional costs but still may take a few weeks to arrive).

You will need to check entry requirements for your destination. Some include certain vaccinations. Many will require a visa. While some countries allow you to apply for a visa upon arrival in the airport, it is advised that you apply before (you will avoid long lines and any complications). Note, many countries do not allow you to apply upon arrival. For example, everyone traveling to Ghana *must have a visa from the Ghanaian embassy*.



Travel Medical Clinic

All those traveling to a developing country need to visit a travel clinic. They will give you the proper medical preparations for your trip. You need to visit the clinic 4-6 weeks before departure. Immunizations will be recommended based on the country you are traveling to. For example, in Ghana you need yellow fever, hepatitis A and B, and typhoid. Other routine vaccinations that you might consider: meningococcus, polio, rabies, measles, tetanus. Note: Doctors may recommend additional. Ensure that the medical clinic gives you documentation of your immunizations, as you may be asked for it upon arrival in country.

Malaria medication are also essential in a rural setting. The travel clinic will advise you on which drug to take and prescribe it to you. Make sure to start taking the malaria pills when advised and the entire prescribed amount (usually several days before departure and after returning). Also recommended is diarrhea medicine (to bring just in case). Travel clinics will make recommendations but anti-diarrheas meds can also be bought over-the-counter. Make sure you have enough of your regular medicines for the duration of the trip and pack in a safe location.

Note: You may be asked to show documentation of your vaccinations upon country arrival.

Travel Insurance

We recommend getting travel insurance in case of an emergency within the country. Standard insurance policies typically do not cover travel. If you are volunteering, some organizations may require a specific insurance. We recommend www.travelguard.com/

Some flights or travel agencies will recommend low cost travel insurance options which can be less inclusive so make sure to check specifics.

For US citizens – Smart Traveler Enrollment Program

The United States embassy has a Smart Traveler Enrollment Program which tracks where US citizens are traveling around the world. This enables the embassy to know who is in a country, especially in an emergency. You will also receive travel advisories and information relating to your specific travel countries.

The program is free, sign up: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

For non-US citizens, check your embassy webpage for details.



Cell Phones

Paying for an international plan vs. getting a phone number in your destination country

Getting a SIM card within your traveling country will be cheaper. You will purchase credit on a pay-as-you-go basis which is easy to buy on in most countries.

You can use an old phone that has SIM card capabilities. You will need to ensure the phone is unlocked for international use. This typically requires you calling the cell phone service provider (AT&T, Verizon, etc.). Simple, cheap phones can also be bought in country at the time you purchase your SIM card.

SIM cards can be bought at phone service retailers and small stands throughout the country. You will need identification to register, make sure you have copies of your visa and passport. Countries may have other requirements as well, so be sure to research what you'll need to get a SIM card. For example India, you need evidence of where you are residing while in-country. You can typically get a letter from a hostel/hotel or organization for this purpose.

The downside to an international phone? You won't have your contacts and may not have [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#) capabilities to share your amazing experience.

You can always bring your other phone and reference it when you need to. Your phone will work in other countries, even if you don't have the international plan, but to use it will be costly. Sometimes people use their current cell phones to call home and say they have arrived, before they get their country specific SIM.

Most service providers also have international travel plans. This allows you to keep your same phone and same phone number. You can see the data plans they offer so you can instantly share your experiences with friends and family!

The downside to an international plan on your phone? It is more expensive than an in-country phone. You should immerse yourself in culture, not your phone! This is a unique experience, do it without technology (or only when it's needed). Don't worry, you'll be able to share your photos and stories from an internet café.

A cell phone is important for traveling but don't let it take away from your experience!

A few more tips...

Important Documents to carry with you (on flight and in country)

- Important contact information (hostel/main contacts/home country embassy info)
- Addresses and telephone numbers of where/who you are staying with
- Passport, extra passport photos
- Plane flight and trip Itinerary
- Copies of passport and visa

Things to know

- How to call home. Research country codes for calling out of the country.
- Give your itinerary and ways to reach you to at least 3 people - if you change your itinerary let them know.
- Make sure you know who is picking you up from the airport, or how you will get to your first in-country destination.
- Know your money plan: Always take some cash, but most cities will have ATM availabilities. Be aware there are ATM fees and some locations may be inactive or not easy to get to immediately upon arrival. VISA is much more widespread than MasterCard.

Set up a blog

Tell people you are going on your trip and set up a blog so anyone can follow you! There are many free blog sites you can customize for your trip. We like wordpress.com. Check out Lauren Grimanis's example of her 2012 summer trip: lgsummer2012.wordpress.com/

And for fun....

Check out travel sites for the safe and fun areas in your travel country. And consider planning short trips to different areas of the country for a well rounded experience. [Lonley Planet](#) always has good guides to places to stay, activities and restaurants. There are also



The image shows a screenshot of a travel blog titled "Lauren Grimanis Summer 2012 Travels". The blog features a world map with several travel routes marked by arrows. The routes start from "Massachusetts" and lead to "Ghana", "Uganda", "Kenya", "India", and "Bangladesh". The blog's navigation menu includes "Home", "About", "Ghana", "Bangladesh", "India", "Istanbul", "Kenya", and "Greece". Below the map, there are buttons for "OLDER POSTS" and "NEWER POSTS", and a search bar. The current post title is "The Masai Mara".



Packing

If you plan on traveling within your destination country (or from country to country), pack ALAP— as light as possible. We recommend a hiking backpack and be able to walk at least 1 mile with it.

For those who will be volunteering or have a base-location, international airlines typically allow two bags, fifty pounds each, for a total of 100 pounds of luggage. One bag cannot exceed 50 lbs. You will be asked to take items out of an overweight bag at the airport.

Try to make your luggage stand out—it will be much easier to locate once at baggage claim. Ribbons and bright colored tape do the trick!

3 Tips for an efficient pack

1. Roll, don't fold (rolling also avoids wrinkles).
2. Stuff socks inside of shoes.
3. Don't bring double—talk out what you're packing with your fellow travelers (you all don't need your own shampoo).

Checking baggage weight.

Pulling out all your clothes and undoing all your packing in front of the ticket booth at the airport is not fun. Weigh your baggage before the airport so you know what it weighs! Not everyone has a special luggage weight—here's how you can weigh your bulky bag with just a bathroom scale.

1. Weigh yourself and step down.
2. Weigh yourself again while holding your luggage.
3. Take the difference of the two weights to see how heavy (or light!) your bag is.

The Essential Packing List

We've put together this list of essential items to consider packing when traveling to Africa or any other developing country.

Note: This list is based upon traveling to Ghana— you should always research appropriate dress for your destination country.

Clothing:

Hat
Sunglasses
Rain coat/windbreaker
Skirts/dresses (knee length or longer)
Long sleeved shirt
T-shirts (more colored than white)
Shorts (for lounging—no booty shorts)
Pants/jeans
At least 1 nicer outfit
Sneakers/hiking boots
Nicer pair of shoes
Sandals/flip flops
Underwear (cotton is best)
Socks

Toiletries:

Toothbrush/paste
Shampoo/conditioner
Body wash
Band-aids
Chap stick
After-bite
Deodorant
Towels/wash clothes
Tampons (if needed)
Brush-Hair bands
Toilet paper
Anti-bacterial ointment
Razor
Tweezers
Scissors
Lotion
Contacts/Glasses (solution, case, etc.)
Anti-bacterial wipes

Documents:

VISA
Passport
Airline tickets
Trip itinerary
Ghana contact info
Insurance card
Travel insurance policy
Vaccination documents
Money

Other:

Bug spray (DEET)
Sun screen
Hand sanitizer
Mosquito net
Malaria pills
Regular prescriptions
Anti-acid medicines
Diarrhea medicines
Pain relievers
Inhaler/Allergy medications
Flashlights
Money carrier (wallet, sack, etc.)
Backpack
Camera
Video Camera
Batteries
Plug Converter/adapter
Memory Cards
Books/magazines/eReader
Journal
Watch
Zip lock bags
Family/home pictures
Gifts (for hosts or anyone you're staying

The Akaa Project

Creating Opportunity for Families in the Eastern Region of Ghana

To learn more about us or for more resources visit

www.theakaaproject.org

Connect, Share, Learn



The Akaa Project is a nonprofit organization working to create opportunity through educational, financial and healthcare initiatives in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Have questions? Contact us, we'd love to hear from you.