



Posted by WENDY PERRIN | APRIL 30, 2015

How to Ace a Trip to a Remote Place



It's fun to fantasize about going to the most remote places on the planet. For me at least, there's no greater travel thrill than getting to be a pioneer. Some of my favorite trips have been to tiny islands in Fiji run by tribal chiefs, nomadic encampments in the deserts of Morocco and Syria that aren't on any map, and forgotten outposts of civilization from Arctic Alaska to Laos. It can be a challenge, though, just to get to such places, much less penetrate the isolated cultures you find there.

And what if you need help in an emergency? In the wake of recent catastrophic events in two of the world's most remote places—the deadly earthquake in Nepal, and the avalanches on Mount Everest—the challenge of getting help when you need it is all too clear. So here's my hard-earned advice for traveling to remote places:

1. Carry a satellite phone or satellite-messaging device.

Otherwise you may have no connectivity whatsoever. (A “hotel” at the far reaches of civilization may say it has Wi-Fi, but assume it doesn't.) Satellite communications devices have dropped dramatically in price in recent years and can be rented inexpensively.

2. Pack your own pharmacy.

It can be tough to find medicines you might need so, if there are prescription antibiotics or pain relievers that work for you, pack them. You may end up needing to be your own doctor.

3. Eliminate logistical challenges with a destination specialist.

Should your transportation planning and other logistics turn daunting, there are highly connected travel fixers who can make every challenge go away.

4. Ensure you'll be rescued in an emergency.

Global Rescue, the medical evacuation and crisis response service, can extract you from even the most remote places, should your health or security be endangered. The company regularly sends critical-care paramedics and special ops personnel around the world to respond to members facing emergencies. In fact, they're in the Himalayas at this moment, evacuating travelers trapped on Everest. A Global Rescue membership also gives you access to the Global Rescue mobile app, which keeps you apprised of local developments. Here's more on what to do in an emergency.

5. Know where the nearest best hospital is.

It's important to know which are the best hospitals, not just in the capital city (which could be hours away from where you are) but elsewhere too. If you don't book your trip through a destination specialist who knows which hospitals are reliable, it's even more important to have a Global Rescue membership or a travel insurance provider who will know the best hospital and be willing and able to get you there.

6. Confirm your flights, then reconfirm.

It's easy to get stranded in a remote place: If there are flights, they may operate once every five days, and they're likely on small planes that are often overbooked. So double-confirm your flights—which, in places with no connectivity, could mean figuring out who's the local person who knows someone at the airline. “Check in” early too.

7. Visit the local school and church.

While some isolated communities have a culture of extreme hospitality toward strangers (Fogo Island, Newfoundland, is a good example), some are deeply suspicious of outsiders (Point Hope, Alaska, comes to mind). I am not religious, but often it's at the local church that I've found the most welcoming people, and typically it's at the school that I've found the people who are most curious to get to know outsiders.

8. Carry photos and postcards from home.

These are great conversation starters in remote communities. Use the photos to show the locals where and how you live, and give them a postcard from home to keep. This has opened doors for me: When you show them the house or neighborhood where you live, they're more likely to show you their house and neighborhood.

9. Use a mini instant-print camera.

Every isolated culture is different, of course, and it's important to ask a subject's permission before taking his or her photo. But I've found that if you use a camera like this to take mini Polaroid photos of people you meet (or, of you posing with them), and you present them with the photo as a gift, it wins them over—and, from that point on, they are happy to be your photo subject. That's because you've sent them a message that you are about giving and sharing, as opposed to taking and leaving.

10. Bring small gifts.

Isolated cultures come with their own sets of rules, and once you start to figure out those rules, you may realize they involve gift giving. Also, you may need to ask for favors—a lot of them—and little gifts can come in handy. Pencils, balloons, stickers (for children), and baseball caps have worked for me (in addition to the aforementioned postcards).

11. Purchase the locals' handmade artwork.

In my experience, a highly effective goodwill gesture that opens doors is to show admiration for the people you meet by buying their handmade crafts and art. You probably won't be able to use a credit card, so bring plenty of cash in the local currency.

You'll find more travel advice from Wendy at WendyPerrin.com.