



**but before
you do,
read this!**

Australian Mercy recruits and takes volunteers to visit its overseas projects. In order to make sure that each volunteer is fully informed about the outreach they are going on and to help them understand more of what is expected of them we have produced several documents to try and help get everyone on the same page.

The purpose of this booklet is to try and explain what we require of our volunteers and why certain guidelines are in place.

Please read and discuss this in conjunction with the following documents

- Australian Mercy Volunteer --Code of Conduct
- Australian Mercy Volunteer - Child Protection Statement
- Australian Mercy Volunteer - Images and Messages Statement
- Australian Mercy Volunteer – Complaints Procedure

Introduction - Please do not trash my house.



Imagine that you are invited over to a friend's house for dinner. It is a new build and they have a muddy driveway outside and a new white carpet inside.

When you come to visit them in their new house you may well find that they have some house rules that they will expect you to follow when you visit; one of which will be please take your shoes off before you come inside the house.

The décor they have picked may not be to your taste; their furnishings may seem to you to be a little out of left field, but this is their house and as a visitor you see that you must abide by their rules.

In such situation we understand why we need to take off our shoes and we have no problem complying with their request to take off our shoes before we enter the house.

It is the same when we work in a cross-cultural context. It is like we are visiting someone else's house, and they have expectations of how we should behave.

In some Muslim countries there is no alcohol served and the drinking of alcohol that is bought into the country by visitors is illegal. In other countries people may drive their cars on the other side of the road to what we do in our country. They may eat with different utensils and they may expect a certain level of respect to be shown in regards to dress code and public behaviour.

When we travel to other countries we are expected to adjust to the expectations of the local culture. We are in fact visiting their house, and their rules apply.

We see easily with regards to road rules. Australians who drive in the US on the left hand side of the road will either be arrested or cause a serious accident. It does not matter what you are allowed to

do in Australia; you are now in America and different expectations and laws apply. Other cultural rules or expectations may not be as obvious.

Foreign governments take notice of what we say and how we act and they remember. One time at Bangkok airport an Australian journalist was arrested as he entered the country and was eventually jailed for defaming the King of Thailand in an article he published in Thailand two years previous to his arrest. The Thai government just waited for his passport to show up at the airport and a few hours after entering the country he had to defend himself before a Thai magistrate. He ended up spending several years in jail.

This should be a reminder to us of the dangers of social media. The public comments you make on Facebook and Twitter or other social media may also be watched and flippant remarks can cause serious problems.

When travelling overseas, you may not agree with aspects of a country's culture, and you may disagree with some of their laws, but if you are visiting that country you need to respect their laws and their culture, not to do so could cause a lot of trouble for you and for the people you are travelling with.

In some countries such as Thailand they have tourist police. The tourist police are there to both guide tourists and arrest them if they break the law. Getting on the wrong side of the tourist police can see you jailed, deported or both!



1. Dress codes

Australian Mercy's dress code rules have to do with respecting culture and not causing offense. We expect all team members to observe these rules.

Asia is very conservative. In tourist areas of its cities you can see westerners dressed very immodestly. As these are tourist areas this immodest dress code is generally tolerated, but ask the local people what they think and you may be surprised to hear remarks and complaints about the behaviour tourists and comments about their disrespectful dress codes.



I was in a tourist area in Thailand one day and three Thai bouncers were throwing out a poorly dressed western man from a bar. This man had obviously had too much to drink. The man resisted and tried to fight off the bouncers, who then pushed him to the ground the continually kicked him until he was bleeding, as this was happening, all the market stall owners nearby cheered and called out words of encouragement to the bouncers. I got the

impression that inside these stall holders there was an inner seething and this event was a vicarious opportunity for there to be some payback for the continued immodest dress codes and poor behaviour of Western tourists.

Dress codes and behaviour count. In village settings there is no dress code tolerance it is just disrespectful not to dress modestly. If you decide to dress immodestly in such a situation the local people will see it as insulting. It is VERY rude.

Specifically in most places women are expected to cover up. In strict Moslem counties it may mean covering up from head to toe. You can be arrested for not complying. In other places in Asia it is not as strict but women are expected to have their crotch area covered with a shirt or baggy T shirt and should wear tops with sleeves. They should wear a bra and no plunging or revealing necklines and dresses need to be below the knee. In some cases ¾ length pants are fine as long as the crotch area is covered.

On a tourist beach a bikini for women and *Speedos* for men may be acceptable (tolerated) but in a rural situation these would be totally offensive. What would be acceptable in a village would be swimming in long shorts and a non see-through Tee shirt. (Girls would need to wear a bra.)



Men need to wear long shorts and a top; and long pants and a collared shirt in church. These expectations are cultural and to the locals make as much sense as leaving you muddy shoes by the door of a house that has new white carpet laid.

In some cultures, it is really appreciated if visitors dress in clothes similar to what the local people are themselves wearing; but be careful when emulating local dress codes and ask if all the components are safe or advisable to wear.

One team we had in India had a girl who liked to make fashion statements, this is ok in the west but she liked the idea of wearing a man's Moslem prayer hat because it matched her Punjabi and would send a *message of unity* to all her saw her walking through the slum in she was working. She thought it was unreasonable when she was asked to remove the man's prayer hat because her leaders were concerned for her safety at the hands of radical Moslem men who lived in the same slum who did not share her fashion sense.

In the past some team members have spoken out their objections to the their liberties being so violated by dress codes, but if dressing modestly for the sake of respect for others is a problem for you, then perhaps you should not go!

Consider:

What types of clothing am I comfortable wearing?

Am I willing to heed advice from locals as to what is suitable to wear?

Do I have problems with the Australian Mercy dress code? How can I resolve these before I go?

2. Public conversation and behaviour

The conversations you have will be listened to if for no other reason so that those who are near to you can practice their English. Waiters, stall holders, immigration officials, taxi drivers, hotel staff they are all listening to what you say and noting how you behave. If what you say or do is offensive to them the police could be called and not just you, but the whole group you are with could be in serious trouble.

One time a group of Mormon missionaries were arrested by the tourist police in Thailand. One of them was sitting on Buddha's lap in a temple whilst another was taking his photo. The whole group, not just the offender was immediately arrested, jailed and deported. They were lucky not to be spending years in jail!

Your conversation and public behaviour can put the whole team at risk. Think about what you are saying and doing. Does it show respect for the culture you are in?

Consider:

Think about a time when what you said or heard was either misunderstood, or caused unintentional offence. How could the situation have been made different?

3. Team solidarity



Teams go to Australian Mercy projects lots of reasons, some are educational, others medical, others may be providing other services and assistance. Each team's timetable will be defined by the project and the needs that are being addressed by that team.

Working as a team is the best way to survive an outreach in a difficult culture. Each team will have a timetable and expectations of team members.

Australian Mercy expects team members to be faithfully communicating with their team leader and keeping to the team timetable and attending all team meetings.

Your team leader will have set out a timetable, if for some reason you find the time table difficult, speak to your leader.

Your team leader will call or schedule meetings as needed, if a meeting is called or scheduled it is a priority for you to attend.

In many countries there is good mobile coverage and local sim card can be bought cheaply and inserted in to phones. It is recommended that as many people as possible have a local sim card in their phone and all people on the team share their numbers, that way if anyone is lost or needs help, then they have a means by which they can contact their team leader or other team members.

Consider:

What are some ways that you can think of to build team unity?

In what ways do you think working as a team better accomplishes the project objectives?

4. Complaints

If you have a complaint, speak to your leader; if the food is an issue speak to your leader. Do not complain to others and never tell your leader. Speak to your leader and let them work it out in the context of the whole group.

If you have a complaint you want to make of a serious nature then the first port of call is the team leader. If you want to go higher with your complaint then please read the Australian Mercy complaint procedure which is attached to this booklet.

Consider:

Have you ever been in a place where a person had a problem with you that they never told you about, and you only found out afterwards from others? (How did you feel?)

What principles about problem solving do you think are important for people to remember when working together in a team?

5. Health and safety

Your health and safety is tantamount to the success of the outreach. You need to make sure that you are eating well, only drinking water that is safe, getting enough rest etc. If the team timetable does not allow for you to get enough rest – speak to your leader. They are not mind readers they need you tell them of your difficulties or concerns.

If you are sick, **do not** just soldier on – tell your leader, see a doctor if necessary, get medicine, take time off, rest – your safety is very important to the success of the team it is ok to be sick and it is ok to be in a place where you need to rest.

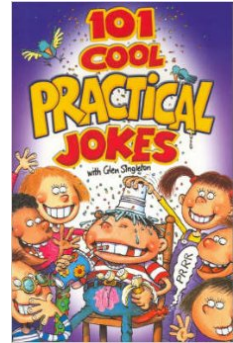
Make sure you are taking any medications or malarial prophylaxis that you have been prescribed. A multivitamin tablet may also be a good thing to be taking. If you are in a hot environment a regular drink of Oral Rehydration mixture will help to replace salts and sugars that body is losing through perspiration and natural fluid loss.

Drugs are a serious issue. If you are on medication bring a copy of the doctor's script with you. Illegal drugs are a huge risk. Penalties for smuggling drugs no matter how *accidental* or *innocent* it might seem to you in places carry heavy penalties; in some cases, death.

6. Jokes and humour

Every outreach has a joker on it and sometimes small practical jokes make for a light hearted moment, but before you plan your first practical joke, ask yourself,

- How will the locals who observe or hear about the joke take it, will be offensive?
- Is it going to be dangerous in any way to any other person?
- What could go wrong? Is there a safer way to have fun?
- Will it humiliate the person, shame them or make them feel bad?
- Will it put anyone at risk in any way?



If you want to have fun, do not have it at someone else's expense.

Practical jokes may seem funny at the time but sometimes things can go horribly wrong, so think before you act.

Consider:

Have you ever seen a practical joke go wrong? How could it have been avoided?
What are some good ways to have fun and foster healthy relationships in a team?

7. Public behaviour

I have seen team members doing silly things on days off. One team I observed from the US all hired motor bikes for a day off and had drag races up and down the streets of Chiang Mai. They put their safety at risk, the safety of bystanders at risk and annoyed other hotel guests as they carried out this escapade and, they were annoyed when the hotel manager asked them to stop.

Ask yourself, would I do this at home? If no, then why would you do it in someone else's country?
If you would do it at home is it appropriate to do it in someone else's country?

Consider:

What do you see as acceptable standards of public behaviour?
Is it reasonable to expect local people to put up with badly behaving foreigners?

8. Image responsibility

Most people like to remember their time away with photos and memorabilia. When you are taking a photo think carefully about the subject matter and the story that the photo tells.

Images and the messages that accompany them can misrepresent people and communities and cause the general public to think of the situations represented therein in terms that could be untrue and which could present them in terms of potentially dangerous stereotypes.



Furthermore, situations may exist where the people or communities photographed are trying to avoid political and social repercussions and may not want their image, name or location disclosed in anyway.

Social media makes image and message management a must therefore Australian Mercy asks all volunteer workers to check with their leader before they upload images and stories. If the wrong image or story goes viral it cannot be undone.

You will be given a copy of our image and message statement to sign. Please read it and adhere to the principles outlined therein. They are there to protect innocent and vulnerable people who are trusting us to do the right thing by them,

- Avoid photos of naked children
- Avoid photos that present people in potentially dangerous stereotypes
- Make sure the photo **IS** the true story.
- Do not provide names and locations
- Get permission from parents / guardians before photographing children; and from adult subjects before photographing them.

Consider:

Have you ever had a photo taken of you that you didn't like? How did it make you feel?
Is it reasonable to ask someone if you can put his or her image on your social media page?

9. Sexual integrity

Australian Mercy has a zero tolerance of sexual abuse and does not in any way allow its team members to act in ways that would be contrary to its values and policies. This includes the frequenting of brothels and strip clubs and engaging in behaviour that is culturally offensive or sexually harassing.

Many women in Asia are trafficked into brothels where they are abused and forced to work as prostitutes. Many die prematurely of HIV / AIDS.

Some local people find Western attitudes towards sex and intimacy concerning and are uncomfortable even with public expressions such as kissing or hugging.

If any member of Australian Mercy sexually abuses or harasses another person they will be sent home, no questions asked! If a volunteer frequents a brothel, strip club or picks up a prostitute for the purposes of sex. They will be sent home.

a. Sexual abuse

The NSW government defines sexual abuse as;

Sexual assault occurs when a person is forced, coerced or tricked into sexual acts against their will or without their consent, or if a child or young person under 18 is exposed to sexual activities.

http://www.sexualassault.nsw.gov.au/VOSA/sexual_assault_victims.html

If a sex crime is committed on foreign soil by an Australian citizen / resident despite what local authorities do, it may be enough to see a person charged taken before an Australian court of law when they return to Australia if the incident is made known to Australian authorities.

Australian Mercy will fulfil all of its legal obligations with regards to incidents of sexual abuse that may occur on its international projects and will not withhold information from local investigating authorities.

Australian Mercy will also make a full and frank disclosure to Australian authorities that are investigating cases of sexual assault that may occur on its national and international projects.

In Australia people found guilty of sexual crimes by an Australian court have to be registered as sex offenders.

b. Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is defined by the Australian Human rights commission thus;

Sexual harassment can take many different forms – it can be obvious or indirect, physical or verbal, repeated or one-off and perpetrated by males and females against people of the same or opposite sex.

Sexual harassment may include:

- *staring or leering*
- *unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against you or unwelcome touching*
- *suggestive comments or jokes*
- *insults or taunts of a sexual nature*
- *intrusive questions or statements about your private life*
- *displaying posters, magazines or screen savers of a sexual nature*
- *sending sexually explicit emails or text messages*
- *inappropriate advances on social networking sites*
- *accessing sexually explicit internet sites*
- *requests for sex or repeated unwanted requests to go out on dates*
- *behaviour that may also be considered to be an offence under criminal law, such as physical assault, indecent exposure, sexual assault, stalking or obscene communications.*

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/guides/sexual-harassment#sh>



Some people argue that are just touchy feely kind of people and the rest of the world will have to get used to them. Wrong! If someone says no to a hug, or a kiss, or a touch no matter how innocent the intention may be, then it is no and the person must immediately desist or risk being accused of being sexually harassing.

Sexual harassment is wrong and it is demeaning and it is against the law.

If you are travelling with your spouse or person that you share an intimate relationship with; for the sake of the people's culture that you are visiting, please keep all affectionate behaviour behind closed doors.

c. Child Protection

Australian Mercy has a strong child protection policy and a zero tolerance of child abuse. A copy of our child protection statement is attached to these documents that defines unacceptable behaviour. All volunteers are expected to read, sign and adhere to this statement.

Anyone who is found to have abused a child in any way will be sent home.

Consider:

Have you ever seen sexual harassment in your work place or community? (Comment)

Discuss public intimacy – “the local people need to get over it!”

Is it your responsibility to report matters of child abuse? How?

10. Lawful behaviour

It is important that we act legally when we travel. Respecting other people's laws is key to respecting their culture. In someone else's house it is their rules that matter. Please make sure that all your behaviour is sensitive and lawful. This may take some research on your behalf.

Are you on a medication that is legal in Australia? Is that same medication legal in the country you are visiting? For example codeine is a banned substance in Greece. If your medication has codeine in it and you enter Greece you may be arrested and possibly jailed. In 1987 a female tourist was jailed in Greece for bringing in tablets into the country that she was taking for period pain because they had codeine in them. She was treated as a drug trafficker.

Are the things you want to carry in to your target country legal to bring in, are all the things you want to bring back to Australia legal to bring back here? Australian customs will check all animal products, wood items, and things made out of the skins of protected species of animals. Please check before you leave as to what you can't bring back with you.

Are you going to drive overseas? Do you need an international drivers licence to do so?

In our behaviour we want to be sensitive, lawful and respectful in all we do.

Consider:

What is something that I may have to find out about in order to be confident regarding its legalities?

Are you going to drive overseas? Do you need an international drivers licence to do so?

11. Eight things to remember to do before I go

1. Make a will and have left it in the possession of a trusted friend or family member.
2. At your own expense, take out adequate health and travel insurance that will cover you, should you need extended hospitalisation, medical treatment, or emergency evacuation from any location whilst you are part of the outreach team.
3. Make sure that you have adequate personal spending money.

4. Inform Australian Mercy in writing of any known medical condition, and / or allergy from which you suffer, and inform your team leader of any medication you are currently using, or may need to use whilst on outreach.
5. Inform the outreach leader of any dietary needs that you may have.
6. At your own expense, arrange with your local Doctor to undergo the necessary inoculations for this outreach. We strongly suggest that a tetanus booster along with other injections may be necessary.
7. Regularly check relevant government websites (such as www.smartraveller.gov.au/) for warnings of terrorist alerts or travel warnings prior to your departure date.
8. Register with smartraveller.gov.au

Your team leader will have a talk to you and fill you in on issues that pertain to your location and will cover these and other things such as local currency, how to shop in the markets, how to get around and who to contact in an emergency.

Happy travelling and we hope that your outreach will be the best experience for you and for the people you are visiting overseas!