

Fieldwork Tips

BEFORE YOU GO

Exploratory trip. Do a pre-trip, ideally six months before starting your project. If you can't do a pre-trip, give yourself one month to scout out the location, make connections, etc. Try to get visiting researcher status at a local university.

Be sure to check the local news regularly for any events that might be related to your research; for safety precautions; and/or for any possible construction, road closures, etc., that may impact your travel arrangements.

Logistics. Think carefully about how you schedule your research (i.e. logistics, funding, etc.) – it could make more sense to do a few short trips rather than one long trip.

Get business cards with your email address, website, and affiliation. You can also consider getting local business cards once you get to the fieldwork site and include local cell phone number, and any local affiliations you may have.

Figure out what logistics you will need to take care of once you get there (eg: local tax ID, bank account, etc).

Housing. In Latin American cities, Airbnb is a good way to find housing before you even get to the site (make sure you know the location you are choosing). Sometimes, it might be wise to book a short (1-2 week) stint on Airbnb and then decide whether you want to extend the booking once you've actually lived there. Landlords often charge higher rates on Airbnb (by the order of \$100-200 per month than if you were to sign a rental agreement locally). If you are staying for a long period, contact the host to ask for a larger discount than the monthly rent.

If you are traveling for a short period of time (e.g., a pre-trip) and if you know where most of your meetings will be, it may make the most sense to find housing close to where most of the meetings will be held. Be sure this area is safe!

Visa. Investigate whether you need a research visa for the country you are going to; if so, begin the visa process as early as possible to avoid any delays.

Some countries require a research permit that is separate from a research VISA. Many countries (especially in Africa) require 1) special VISAs for foreign researchers and 2) research permits from national/local government. The processing time for these can be very lengthy, especially if the process is not electronic, and might require documentation from local institutional partners (challenging to receive via email while you are in the US) that you would ideally obtain during your exploratory trip.

Online presence. If you don't have a website yet, put together a website you can include in your email signature when you contact people and that will appear in online searches. Make sure it references your institutional affiliation and describes your research in a way that gives you

credibility but is vague enough to not inform about your hypotheses (it could be problematic for your interviews if your subjects know all your hypotheses ahead of time). People will often google you before giving you an interview. Make sure your prospectus and related presentations are not available online.

Health. Get any pending health issues resolved before you travel, and stock up on medications you take regularly (they may not have them where you are going). Get all vaccinations and antimalarials recommended for the destination country (get these early). If anyone is enrolled in SHIP, the Tang Center offers a really great Travel Clinic that will give you all the vaccinations you need for a particular trip (based on where you are going), and will give you a steep discount on the medication you might need in the field.

Register your fieldwork trip at UC Travel. By doing so, you will be covered under UC Travel insurance for most medical or security related problems you may face while doing research in a developing country. The insurance coverage is quite extensive, and will defray most of your unanticipated medical expenses whilst in the field.

<http://www.ucop.edu/risk-services/loss-prevention-control/travel-assistance/>

Data management. Figure out your data management and security plan before you go and practice storing your data using your different appliances/tools, etc. Make sure to think of all the types of data you will collect including interview audios, paper/book scans, surveys, etc.

IRB. Start applying for IRB early! Even if you do not anticipate having a research assistant or an interpreter, describe how you would recruit, train, and work with such a person. That way, if you find later that you need an assistant, you can work with one without modifying your IRB application.

<http://cphs.berkeley.edu/>

Research partner. Consider finding a research partner to either travel with you or work with you locally.

Letter of introduction. Get a general letter of introduction from your advisor describing your work and your purpose for being in the country. The letter should be in the appropriate language for your destination. Get as many signed originals (at least 10) as you can.

Find an affiliation with a local university (if possible). Working in cafes can be very expensive. If you have connections with local professors who can help you find an office at a university, this could likely prove very helpful. People may ask you where you work; having a local affiliation with a local university can be a good signal. Be sure to check out the institution you would like to affiliate with as some institutions have a “reputation” that might preclude you from getting access to certain organizations. (This advice makes the most sense if you are going to the field for a long period of time)

PACKING LIST

- Scanned PDFs and photocopies of important documents (e.g., passport, driver's license, insurance card, visas)
- Ziploc bags of varying sizes
- Digital voice recorder
- Well-stocked first aid kit
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray
- Portable cell phone charger
- Set devices to sync with cloud (including voice recorder) or carry USB memory sticks and external hard drive
- Small quick-drying towel
- Converter
- Digital camera (a good camera that will allow you to photograph documents and other useful material)

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Money. Carry some cash with you at all times in the local currency for transportation (i.e. taxis, buses, etc.). Ask others who have traveled to your fieldwork country what the best practices are for exchanging money to the local currency. It may be that it is best to exchange money at the airport, at a bank, at a local currency exchange downtown, or by withdrawing it directly from an ATM.

Protip for Mexico: Terminal 2 at the DF airport has the best exchange rates.

Cell phone internet. Make sure to have cell phone internet (you will need google maps, etc when you are in the street). Consider getting a roaming plan from your US carrier or bringing an unlocked phone for which you can get a local cell phone with sim card.

RA for scheduling interviews. If an RA will help you schedule interviews, have them create a new email account that you can access. This will allow you to take over if they suddenly stop working for you.

Share a task management tool that allows your RA to include all the progress they have made, who they called and what the outcome of the conversation was. This is will also let you take over and is a good monitoring tool.

During interviews. Some subjects have their own agenda for interviews. Assuming that you are doing unstructured or semi-structured interviews, it's best just to let the subject talk. Try to stay neutral regardless of what they have to say; don't cut them off or hurry them along. Once they are finished, it is likely that they will be more willing to answer your questions or discuss subjects that are more relevant to your project. Always accept an invitation to an event or into someone's home (but make sure it is safe first!).

Electricity. Whenever you have electricity, charge everything to capacity.

Receipts. Keep all your receipts (when possible) to use when filing your taxes or for eventual reimbursement purposes.

Dress code. Low key professional outfits are the right way to go in most settings.

ONCE YOU ARE BACK

Backup. Make sure to backup whatever information you collected and did not backup before (handwritten notes, business cards, etc).

Connections. Nurture all the useful connections you have made in the field.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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