

# Show Mercy International Uganda -2009

## Guidelines for Your Trip to Uganda

This handout is designed to give teams an introduction to the Ugandan culture and help you maximize your time and impact during your trip. Whether your service here is for physical improvement, spiritual welfare or a combination of the two, this training guide can help you to:

- Be culturally sensitive
- Maximize your time by being well prepared
- Maintain your personal health and safety
- Work within the Guidelines and Policies of Show Mercy International

Please read this document in its entirety. As a member of a Show Mercy International Team (any team that visits the work we are doing in Uganda), it is important that everyone be on the same page and agree to abide by all of these guidelines.

Being culturally sensitive will greatly help you to avoid common mistakes that can lead to offense and embarrassment to you and the local population. For example, if you are a man and another man held your hand as he showed you the way to his office, you might feel compelled to react with reproach or anger. You would not know that in Uganda it is common for men to be much more affectionate than in other countries and it means nothing more than a gesture of friendship. Knowing this fact prior to having that experience will help you not to feel awkward or have an improper reaction.

When you know the culture, you can be prepared physically and emotionally for differences in behavior, dress and conversation and it can help you avoid some of the uncomfortable feelings of "culture shock."

## Introduction to the Ugandan Culture

Why be culturally sensitive? It is necessary for your welfare as a team member and for the Ugandans who will experience your influence long after you are gone. Outside of western culture, the world's perception of westerners is derived from TV, news and movies. They have an incomplete picture. In Uganda, any light-skinned person is placed in this western category. Often times, this is the worst impression. For example, women are associated with pop idols; therefore, western women are thought to be promiscuous. You will be viewed by your host country based on their stereotype of westerners.

- Each action that you make to counter that stereotype improves the Ugandans' view of you as a person and of westerners as a whole.
- Many times what you think is acceptable or beneficial is actually harmful to the Ugandan people as well as the mission and long term strategy of Show Mercy International.

- The work you are doing for the people of Uganda is for their physical or spiritual welfare. Money and gifts, which are things of immediate pleasure, do not necessarily give lasting satisfaction, relief or assistance.

- Ugandans need to see relief come from God through the church or organization, not the individual visitors.

Whenever there is something which you feel led to do, please, before taking any action or making any promises, talk to a Show Mercy representative for guidance on the best action with regards to Ugandan culture.

There are plenty of things that you will see in any new culture that you are not used to and many things that are acceptable in other cultures but taboo in Uganda. A few examples of each are below.

#### Commonly seen or experienced in Uganda:

- Straight men holding hands or showing affection
- Body odor
- Women breastfeeding in public
- Physical friendliness – everybody shakes hands, sometimes for the entire duration of a conversation
- Lack of toilet facilities – often just a hole in the ground inside a shed

#### Taboo in Uganda:

- Conversation about pregnancy – miscarriages and the infant mortality rate are so high in Uganda that we don't talk to a woman about her pregnancy.
- Conversations about relationships, particularly in the physical sense.
- Public displays of affection between men and women – these are embarrassing to all around. Keep it behind closed doors! This includes holding hands.
- Discussions about personal information with someone who is not a very close friend.
- Smoking and drinking – out in the bush there is no distinction between having a drink and being drunk and smoking is simply looked down upon by everyone.
- Talking about boyfriends/girlfriends – do not say that you have a “boyfriend” or “girlfriend”. For some Ugandans this means that you have a physically-based relationship with someone. You may say that you are dating someone or in a relationship with someone.

## Understanding the Ugandan Culture

### Men and Women

When thinking of the roles of women and men in Uganda, imagine the US during the late 1800s. Men are the leading figures in society and at home, usually raising the funds to support the family. Women are more home-based – raising children, tending gardens, and maintaining the home. When women work outside of the home, it is generally in teaching, nursing, housekeeping or secretarial positions. Because men are the leading figures in the society, it is more common for men to be forward and willing to introduce themselves. Women tend to behave more modestly, seeming shy. They may not approach you or speak to you directly right away. This is not because they do not want to talk or meet you, so please take the time to introduce yourself to both men and women.

## Children – the most blessed among us

Children are children no matter where you go. They smile, laugh, tell jokes and tease. Here in Uganda, they will yell to visitors, stare, ask for gifts and candy, ask for your address, come hold your hand, ask you “How are you?” a million times, and play with every string, gadget and piece of jewelry you have. Don't be afraid to play with them and teach them new games and songs – they will teach you too. Just be aware of the “Don'ts” listed later when interacting with the children.

## Dress Code

What you wear says a lot about what you think about yourself and those you are visiting, so most of the time you should dress in a nice casual way. That is, wear something that you would wear to a moderately priced restaurant back home. For men, jeans are ok, for ladies a comfortable, relaxed knee-length or longer skirt and blouse. It is import to not dress in a way that shouts “money” or dress down in worn-out clothes that say “I pity you”. You should bring nicer clothes to wear in church and relaxed clothes for everyday wear. Most of all, do not dress in an immodest way. A good rule of thumb is not to wear anything that calls attention to any part of your body. This includes too much jewelry and dangle type earrings and necklaces (children will pull them). As a visitor in Uganda remember that you are representing an entire culture through your appearance and behavior. Be modest in your representation.

Again, MODESTY is the best policy

## Women

Everyday wear should consist of dresses or skirts and blouses. If you participate in physical labor, loose-fitting long pants are acceptable. However, when the work that requires long pants is finished, please change back into a skirt or dress. This is necessary to show respect to the Ugandan culture where women almost always wear skirts. Shorts are NEVER acceptable beyond sleepwear. Some ideas are listed below:

### Skirts/Dresses:

- Loose-fitting
- Length should be below the knees. Legs are very provocative in the Ugandan culture. Keep yourself safe and don't live up to the stereotype of Americans!
- Many fabrics can be sheer in the sunlight. If a skirt does show some light or is questionable, please wear a slip.

### Shirts:

- Loose-fitting
- Must have sleeves
- Should be made of a breathable fabric to avoid heat exhaustion
- During the rainy season avoid white! We do not want to have a wet T-shirt contest!
- T-shirts are acceptable outside of church. If the shirt has writing on it, Christian messages are preferred to avoid cultural misconception through display on your clothing.

### **Pants:**

- Loose-fitting
- Breathable fabric
- Loose-fitting

- Durable
- LOOSE-FITTING!!!

## **Men**

Fortunately for men, the culture is much more relaxed in dress.

Remember a few things:

- Keep clothing loose.
- T-shirts are acceptable outside of church. If the shirt has writing on it, Christian messages are preferred to avoid culture misconceptions through display on your clothing.
- Always wear a shirt! Although in many cultures it is acceptable for a man to be seen by a woman when he is not wearing a shirt, it is not so in Uganda. It is extremely embarrassing for a man to be seen by a woman without shirt for both the man and woman. Physical labor is the only exception to this rule, where it is appropriate to have your shirt off.

## **Footwear for Men and Women**

- Remember there are many parasites that would love to make a home in your skin.
- As often as possible wear closed-toed shoes.
- If you must wear sandals please, for your own safety, do not wear them in the bush. The danger of jiggers, ticks or other parasites is too high.

## Money Matters:

The Ugandan currency is Uganda shillings. Visit <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic> for the current exchange rate. You will get the best exchange rate with \$50 and \$100 bills. Please bring the newest bills possible, as the exchange bureau may not accept older bills. Make sure that bills are dated in the year 2003 or later.

## **Dos and Don'ts**

### **PLEASE DO NOT:**

- Give money to individuals, including children, SMI staff or others in any way connected to SMI or the villages that we are working in. Instead, give to SMI and designate the funds. SMI will honor those requests if they fit into our mission.
- Give toys, candy or gifts to any of the Ugandans without the permission of SMI. Instead, give love, hugs, smile, sing songs, etc.
- Sanitize your hands in front of Ugandans. Instead, sanitize discretely, especially before eating.
- Exchange your home address or email address with anyone you meet from Uganda. Communication that occurs outside of the organization often causes misunderstandings at a minimum and has the potential of causing division and damage to the long term plans of Show Mercy International. If you wish to communicate with those that you meet after returning from Uganda, please do so through SMI.

- Promise to pay for a child's school fees, sponsor a child, or care for a child. Talk to SMI first to make sure that the individual you wish to sponsor is among those that SMI feels is among the group that we have been given a mission to assist. Show Mercy is getting sponsors for all of the children living in Hope Children's Home and those attending the Alpha and Omega primary school.
- "Sponsor" a child before finalizing it with the SMI office.

### **Why all this precaution? Why the rules? Aren't gifts good?**

You would think so, but the problem with giving gifts, money, sweets, etc. teaches the Ugandans that:

- Begging is okay and generally brings success. Ugandans will often use the word "partner" to imply that they would like for you to give them financial resources.
- If you need or want something, go to the individual visitor. This creates motives that are impure and damaging to relationships.
- Westerners have everything, and we have nothing. If you can afford to fly here, you are rich in the mind of the Ugandans.

Truly, begging cannot be tolerated. Not only is this behavior destructive and degrading to the personal culture of the individual including adults and children, but consider this: in the bush some parents save all year so that they can have enough to buy ONE PIECE OF CANDY for their child at Christmas. If you are throwing candy and toys at these children, not only do they look up to you as the rich gift-giver, but they also look down on whatever their parents can give to them. It is destructive to the Ugandan family structure when you give gifts in this manner. In the end, we are all working to help the children and the culture. The children and the community need to know that the parents and the organization are the ones to go to when there is a need. Anytime a child or adult asks for something, it is because someone else set up a pattern long ago. Please, for the sake of the culture, ***LEARN TO SAY NO***. It is hard to deny a child, but again, this is for preservation of a society as well as the long term plans for SMI.

If you would like to make a lasting difference, join with us and partner with Show Mercy financially. We will make sure that provision is provided in a way that will give dignity to the Ugandans and prevent destructive behaviors that can hinder our work in Uganda.

### **When Is Giving Appropriate?**

If you wish to give money, please donate it to Show Mercy International. We know where the money is most needed and can be sure to designate funds accordingly. You will also receive a tax deduction by doing so. If there is a specific project to which you wish give, just make it known when you make the donation. If Show Mercy feels that the project is appropriate and needed, we will accommodate that request. There is always the opportunity to sponsor a child, which is a great way to impact a child's life. The people working in the sponsorship program can help you with that decision. Sponsorship is the best gift to give to a child. This gift will improve the quality of life for your child for

the rest of his/her life because of the provided education, meals, value placed upon the child and sometimes even a home to live in.

## **Health and Sanitation**

There are a few guidelines you need to follow to stay healthy during your trip:

- Always drink bottled water or water from containers that has been purified and filtered.
  - Be careful eating from local street vendors or unfamiliar restaurants.
  - Be careful with fruits and vegetables that are already prepared. As a rule, if you can wash and peel it, it is safe.
  - Be careful with germs that you will come in contact with through everyday physical contact, such as holding hands or picking up children. Do not chew on your nails because you will be taking the germs directly into your mouth.
  - If anyone ever spits, sneezes or coughs on your body, particularly your face immediately clean the area with clean water and preferably soap or sanitizer.
  - Use caution when approaching or attempt to help anyone who is bleeding or vomiting – if possible, contact the nearest health professional to help with their situation.
  - Always clean your hands before eating and preferably sanitize regularly for the health of your team.
  - Sodas are popular drinks for Ugandans and Westerners. It is safe to use a straw to drink from the bottle because the bottles are re-used.
- **GET YOUR VACCINATIONS!!!!** To see which vaccinations you need to for your visit to Uganda, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/eafrica.htm#vaccines>.
- It is suggested that you wear insect repellent with at least 25% Deet and sunscreen with an SPF factor of 30 or higher. We are in a higher malaria-concentrated area on a lake that breeds mosquitoes as well as dangerous sun due to being on the equator.

We recommend using a Malaria prevention medication when traveling to Uganda. Please: **DO NOT USE LARIUM (Mefloquine)**. It has been known to cause severe reactions in people taking it including nightmares and delirium. This can affect the team in a very negative way. As part of a Show Mercy Team, you are not allowed to take this brand of medication. We recommend Malarone, but others are also available.

Preventative action is always the best defense, but remember do not be overly rude when cleaning your hands after holding the hand of child. Do not be blatantly disgusted by the touch of other people because this can be very offensive or embarrassing for the nationals.

## **What, Then, Is My Role Here?**

Once again, Show Mercy International thanks you for your commitment to serve in this society, not for self-glorification, but for the betterment of those you serve. Simply remember that you are here to help fulfill the vision and mission that has been given to Show Mercy International. The best help you can give is to help the people is through helping them help themselves. Would a farmer be able to accomplish the work when you are gone? The same applies to any service you perform for another

person. Most importantly, you can provide love to the people that we are supporting. Many children and adults don't experience even a regular hug to show them that they are loved. You can accomplish so much by loving the people. Remember, love never fails and "people touching people" is a very valuable resource that we have to offer.

You are partners working hand in hand with Show Mercy International  
Help us to teach the people how to have a better Uganda – through the work of their hands and by learning from the experience of those from more well-developed societies.

**Photographs and Testimonies**

As part of a Show Mercy team, we ask that provide us with a copy of any photos or videos taken. By being a part of this team, you agree to give Show Mercy permission to use these photos as we choose to advance our mission including allowing us to re-print, use in posts or newsletter or sell if we choose to do so.

We also ask that you give us permission to use any testimonies of team members to further the cause or encourage others to be a part of the mission of Show Mercy International.

**Agreement:**

As part of a Show Mercy International team to Uganda, I acknowledge that I have read all 7 pages of this provided guideline and I agree to fully abide by all of the policies set for therein.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please make a copy of this last page and return it signed to Show Mercy International, PO Box 607, Albany, Oregon 97321