



## **BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER AN ASSIGNMENT...**

### **A few general tips from Centurion to help you plan your task more safely**

#### **Before you go...**

Make sure you are well prepared, and well equipped for your assignment.

#### **Research the location**

Learn everything you can about where you are going. This will help you “risk assess” what you may encounter when you arrive, from climate and geography, to political scene and local customs, and take appropriate action. Find out what, if any, emergency services exist and how they are contactable. Make sure all your personal affairs at home are in order before you leave, e.g. what to do in an emergency and who should be contacted, legal issues regarding your family and estate, finances, etc.

There are many good websites with information and advice for travellers. Some of them are listed on our website. If possible, make contact with locals on the ground before leaving, and ask for up-to-date knowledge, tips and hints. Take maps, and good communications systems. Make sure they will work in the country you are visiting.

Always leave details of your plans, destinations, meetings, and estimated arrival and departure times with a trusted friend or colleague. Call someone regularly to let them know you are safe. Don't take unnecessary risks with your safety, for example in some countries by travelling after dark or off-road. Don't tell strangers about your movements - don't talk loudly over mobile phones in earshot of people you don't know.

Be sensible – be safe.

#### **Vaccinations**

Vaccinations may not be essential for all countries, but it's very important to find out whether the countries you are to visit require them and if so which ones, and make sure you get them well in advance of your trip. If, for example, to counter the possibility of contracting malaria a course of medication is prescribed it is very important to complete the entire course you are given by your doctor or medical advisor. In many developing countries it is also important that you are adequately protected against and are aware of the ways that you could contract infections such as Hepatitis A, Polio, Yellow Fever, Tetanus and HIV.

### **The most commonly required vaccinations are:**

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Cholera
- Japanese encephalitis
- Diphtheria
- Polio
- Yellow Fever
- Malaria
- Smallpox
- Meningococcal Meningitis
- Rabies
- Typhoid
- Tetanus
- Tuberculosis
- Tick-borne encephalitis

### **Insurance**

Make sure you are adequately insured. Many insurance policies do not cover death or injury through acts of war or terrorism. Check the small print very carefully.

### **Take appropriate clothing and equipment**

Choose the right clothing and equipment, including safety equipment, for your assignment. When choosing what to take, wear or carry, consider the following factors:

- Available travel facilities, including serviceability of vehicles
- Nature and length of task
- Environment, i.e. climate, geography, terrain, season
- Accommodation and living facilities – what security do they offer?
- Food, health and hygiene issues
- Any other questionable factors, e.g. political climate, hostilities including warring factions, regional difficulties, crime, poverty
- Availability and nature of re-supplies
- Availability and distance of proper medical facilities
- Insurance
- Vaccinations
- Local customs including clothing and behaviour that may cause offence
- How you are perceived – rich? Western? military-like? different? target?

Many business travellers moving around Western Europe may do so completely unhindered and in safety. However, in other parts of the world the same business traveller may find himself or herself a target for crime, including hostage-taking, extortion, mugging or even worse!

Being well prepared and well briefed about the country that you are visiting will minimise the risk of danger to yourself. Part of your planning should include making sure that you take appropriate equipment and clothing for likely eventualities that may occur for the duration of the visit. In some countries this will include such items as body armour and first aid equipment, including sterile needles.

## **Preparing for hot climates**

Retaining body moisture for as long as possible helps prevent dehydration or heat exhaustion. The following tips will help:

- Lightweight clothing to allow body heat to escape while slowing the evaporation of moisture.
- Light coloured clothing to reflect heat away from the body.
- Cotton cloth holds sweat for a while before it evaporates (man-made (e.g. nylon) clothing does not).
- Loose fitting clothing to cover arms and legs (i.e. long sleeves, full-length trousers).
- Avoiding sunburn.
- A lightweight hat / cap to protect the head from excessive heat / heat stroke.
- Remember that in some hot climates temperatures drop after sunset; a fleece or warm jacket is often necessary.
- Gloves help protect against injuries from undergrowth / bush / scrub.

More information about hot climates can be found in Centurion's Hostile Environments and Emergency First Aid Training Aide-Mémoire.

## **Preparing for cold climates**

You should aim to keep warm by wearing clothing that retains body heat while allowing body moisture to escape. The following tips will help:

- Wool clothing was previously considered best for cold and wet conditions, but is increasingly replaced by modern, synthetic materials that provide both warmth and protection.
- Even when wet, wool does a better job keeping you warm than cotton.
- Layer your clothing. Several thinner garments insulate the body better than one thick layer because the trapped air between the layers provides insulation. You can also remove a layer if you become too hot.
- Denim is a poor choice for cold, wet weather – avoid wearing jeans.
- Think about outer garments. They need to provide protection against cold, wet and wind.
- As much of the body's heat is lost through the head it is important to wear some form of headwear. This should ideally be of "thinsulate" material, and waterproof.
- If walking long distances or for prolonged periods, two pairs of socks are better than one. They also reduce the chance of foot injuries, e.g. blisters, but make sure that circulation is not restricted or it can cause frostbite / immersion foot, etc.
- Gloves are essential.

More information about cold climates can be found in Centurion's Hostile Environments and Emergency First Aid Training Aide-Mémoire.

## **Vehicles and vehicle equipment**

Think also about how you will travel overland. Ensure any hired vehicles (and drivers) are capable of the task and that vehicles are roadworthy. Before setting off, ensure vehicles are carrying sufficient fuel and do a visual maintenance check. If travelling in remote areas, make sure you carry with you emergency supplies of water, food, first aid equipment, fuel, shelter, etc. Also make sure you have adequately route-planned your journey, which includes leaving a note of your estimated time of arrival with a trusted source, who will know what to do in case of emergency or no-show.

## **Emergency bag**

It is important when living or working in volatile areas that you have pre-prepared and keep on-hand nearby an emergency grab bag for use if local circumstances deteriorate and you need to evacuate quickly. We recommend that a small (25-45 litre) bag containing vital equipment to be used in an emergency be kept for such an eventuality. Examples of useful emergency items are:

- Spare clothing suitable for the environment.
- Water bottle and water sterilising tablets.
- Emergency food.
- Map of the area and compass.
- GPS (if possible).
- Pen knife (multi-tool).
- Whistle.
- Waterproof matches / lighter.
- Radio (shortwave).
- Torch, spare bulb and batteries.
- Insect repellent / sun block.
- First aid kit and any personal medication.
- Money (US dollars).
- Photocopy of passport / visa in separate waterproof bag.

It is important to ensure that your emergency bag includes equipment and clothing that reflects the environment you are in. So, if there is no first aid infrastructure, take a good first aid kit. If communications are poor, take some form of communication system that will work. If you are likely to be living outdoors, take survival equipment.

## **Pre-departure HEFAT® training**

Knowing the kinds of risks you may face and how to deal with them will minimise risks to your own life and that of your colleagues, and will give reassurance that you will cope with whatever is thrown at you. Pre-departure training raises awareness of the “uneventuality” – the unforeseen circumstance that may expose you to danger.

Journalists, aid workers and NGOs increasingly come under attack while doing their jobs on the front line. Commercial businesses too are finding that they must do more to protect their staff deployed into the field, most of who may not be accustomed to such “uneventualities” in the course of a normal working life.

A practical way of improving security is through carefully assigned and targeted pre-departure staff training. In addition to improving safety, such training will contribute to the effectiveness of disaster relief operations. Even the most experienced war journalist, or the most travelled veteran, will benefit from Hostile Environment and Emergency First Aid Training.

## **Who needs HEFAT® training?**

The following are examples of sectors of the community Centurion has trained over the last decade, and continues to train:

- Journalists (print, broadcast and agency)
- Aid workers
- NGOs
- Reconstruction experts
- Government overseas development organisations
- Emergency relief workers
- International businesses.

All of these, from time to time, have required their staff to go and work in volatile regions around the world. For many of staff members this will be the first time they have been required to work in areas where the infrastructure is poor, and there are recent or ongoing hostilities. For others, while they may be experienced in the region to which they are sent, their awareness of potential dangers is still low. UK law now requires that managers have a duty of care to ensure that their staff are adequately prepared for their task. For further information about the training we offer, please see Courses on our website.

## **When you arrive at your destination**

Your HEFAT® training will have increased your awareness of how you are perceived, what potential risks you may face, and how you may counter them. Use this information daily, and continually risk-assess your actions on a regular basis. Make sure that you have your emergency bag ready, and that you carry or wear (if necessary) your body armour - it will not save your life if left in the back of the car or the office cupboard. Do not take any unnecessary or uncalculated risks with your life, or that of your colleagues.

In some countries it may be wise to register with your local Embassy or Consulate when you arrive.

## **When you return home**

Passing on information – debriefing - about your assignment can be very useful for others following in your footsteps. This is particularly important to do when risks become known that could be harmful or dangerous to others. Make sure that vital information is passed on and does not lie dormant or forgotten. Remember, your lucky escape could be another person's tragic circumstance.

If you have a particularly difficult assignment which has affected you, it is important to seek out whatever support you may need on return. This may be anything from a gentle discussion with an understanding peer, or a more formal debrief with psychological experts. Witnessing atrocities, deaths or suffering, or being the subject of violence, is outside most of our normal life experiences and if not dealt with appropriately may return at a later date to disrupt family, friendships, careers or life in general. Companies have a duty to look after their staff, and appropriate counselling or debriefing is part of the process.

**For further information or advice about what to do before, during or after assignments, contact Centurion.**

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