

Introduction

Visitors from many countries, including Zambia, come to our parishes. Whether you have had such visitors before, or plan to act as hosts for the first time you will be anxious to make the event a success. It is hoped that this paper will provide some practical advice which, together with your own tact and sensitivity, will ensure that the visit is mutually profitable.

Welcoming Your Guest

It is a good idea to give members of the parish information about the guest, the nature of the visit and some background to his/her country. It is also useful to find out if this is your guest's first visit to this country.

We all find that we need to adjust when we travel and Westerners have the advantage of being able to discover what they are likely to encounter, and to prepare for it. Few African visitors have a thorough briefing before arriving in the UK. When he/she arrives, the impact of welcome will be all important. The British tend to be seen as stiff and formal in some respects and over-casual in others so, a friendly welcome and careful attention paid to introductions will set the visit off to a good start.

Sadly, some overseas visitors have a hard time at immigration, and they may appear in the reception area of the airport feeling a bit battered or shocked. Make them feel very welcome! It maybe good to have a space fleece in case they are feeling cold too. Visitors take time to adjust, so don't overload them with activities. "Europeans have watches: Africans have time" and some need just to be with us for a few days before anything significant happens. Indeed simply being in the UK is significant to them.

Accommodation

Most male guests from overseas would be embarrassed if accommodation were arranged in the home of a single woman. It is safer to ask married couples to act as hosts.

In The Home

Food

If possible find out particular likes and dislikes. People will want to offer hospitality and your visitor will not wish to seem ungrateful but too many large meals and new foods within a short period can be stressful.

Meals should include something hot. Meat, chicken, potatoes, rice, vegetables and fruit are popular, especially stews and casseroles. Few like salad. Encourage your visitor to try unfamiliar food. Desserts may be unfamiliar but most like them. Cheese is not always popular. Our cutlery conventions may be baffling. In Africa the usual drinks are tea, Milo, coffee and orange juices. Explain that water is safe to drink straight from the cold tap and that milk does not have to be boiled. Expect your guest to put what seems to us a lot of sugar into tea!

Clothing

Visitors may not expect our climate to be as cold as it is - even if they have been warned, few will have any enough warm clothing with them. So when meeting them at the airport have something warm to give them. She/he may not have gloves, scarf, nightwear or waterproofs. The vagaries of the British climate can come as a surprise. Offer to put clothes into the washing machine or show them the ropes for doing their own hand laundry. They may be shy to ask.

Heating

Our warm weather may be relatively cold to an African or Asian so expect to provide extra heating. The use of bathroom facilities, room heaters and other equipment unfamiliar to your guest should be demonstrated to avoid possible accident or embarrassment. Put a hot water bottle in the bed, even in the summer.

Health Issues

It is not unknown for visitors to need medical attention. Have a word with your GP or health centre before they come, so that you know the procedure.

Public Transport

Visitors may be reluctant to use public transport on their own. Explain that taxis are rarely used in UK because of expense. Ensure that any transport arrangements are made clearly and in writing, including pick up times and places. Map reading may not be a developed skill.

Cultural Differences

Be prepared for differences. What is considered 'good - manners' in one country may not be so in another. For instance, removing shoes on entering the house is normal in Asia and parts of Africa. Some of our customs will be equally unexpected. African lay Christians often expect everybody in the UK to be an active Christian and they are shocked to find our churches are not full. They also find it hard to understand why we are not as comfortable in talking about Jesus to our neighbours as they are.

Don't be offended if there are fewer "please and thank you's" than we expect. It is simply not the cultural norm in Africa.

Our smooth roads, crammed shops, comfortable public transport (and the price of it!), plumbing and public services generally, bemuse visitors, or make them feel that they are in paradise.

Guests may ask for money: comparing their conditions with ours and it is wise to have talked this out beforehand with somebody who is familiar both with the country and its customs. Small personal gifts are acceptable but larger gifts of money or equipment are best made through the Old Deanery or a recognised Mission Agency.

Pressure of Time

Time will always be at a premium, however, visitors will need to relax, adjust and get over the journey. Further into the visit invitations may snowball so the programme needs control. A regular day off for rest or relaxation should be arranged each week.

Try to include some sightseeing. A visit to the Zoo or the coast as well as the Cathedral, but also try to include a visit to show them areas of poverty in Britain.

Some sensitivity is required over suggesting a day out as most visitors will be dependent on their hosts for transport and/or money for travel and expenses.

On the matter of timekeeping we are notoriously bound by the clock. Remember that others are not!

Itinerary

If possible give them a timed programme or itinerary for their visit so that they know what to expect. Do remember to leave spaces. Encourage others in your Deanery to share the blessing of meeting and entertaining your African visitors but avoid frequent changes in accommodation, remembering it takes time for them to adjust. Praying together can be very valuable.

Language -When your visitor is not over-fluent in English, a large meeting can seem daunting to him/her and difficult for listeners. Small informal gatherings are easier to handle and equally profitable. Visitors will also need time to be quiet, join in parish activities and not always be 'on show'.

Gifts and Money

Christians in this country often want to express their love by giving gifts, and offering to send further gifts when the 'new friend' returns home. This can lead to serious problems. Small personal gifts are fine but be careful not to go beyond that, at least without discussing the matter fully. The collective experience within our diocese has led to the Zambia Group formulating certain guidelines which we are happy to explain.

IMPORTANT - make sure that you make it clear at the start what is acceptable and what is not in terms of making requests of hosts or churches for financial support. To avoid embarrassment the general guideline is the same whether we visit Africa or visitors come to us, the emphasis is on relationships and people should not make personal requests for help or money. All visitors are representatives of their diocese and any requests for or offers of help should be made through diocesan bishops and link structures.

Contact with Home

Making contact with relatives is very important to your guests. Potentially the telephone can be a source of misunderstanding. It is easier to be proactive and provide your guests with prepaid international calling cards for Africa - available from most newsagents. A £5.00 card will often provide someone with several hours calling to both landlines and mobiles.

Please ensure that you show how to use the phone card as in the past visitors have not used them because the instructions were too complex for someone working in a second language.

Church Matters

Your visitors will expect to be publicly welcomed at your church, and to be invited to give testimony and a word. Warn your incumbent! The interview technique is useful here.

Bear in mind that English will be their second language, so speak clearly and not too fast. We may find our visitors difficult to understand, especially at first. Don't be embarrassed to ask them to repeat themselves, or possibly to speak more slowly if addressing a gathering.

Most Deanery visitors from Africa will not drink alcohol, so it helps to explain that most Christians here are not teetotallers and that a little wine with a meal is quite acceptable in the UK. They may also be shocked by Christians smoking.

Safeguarding

Please ensure that visitors understand the importance of safeguarding and have read the Diocese of Bath and Wells Safeguarding policy and guidance. Think through the kind of visits they will be making, and ensure that any special safeguarding issues are communicated: for example if you visit a school that they understand what the policy is as regards taking photographs.

If you allow your guest access to the internet please ensure that people know that their usage will be monitored, and they have understand they should the internet appropriately. Please contact the Safeguarding Officer in the Diocesan Office for specific advice.

Returning Home

Before they return remind your visitors to check in online and choose seats 24 hours before departure and if necessary help them.

If your visitor is accumulating gifts etc. bear in mind that excess baggage is very expensive. While some charity tickets may allow a larger baggage allowance there is usually still a maximum limit per bag and you may face a charge for each kilo over the limit for individual bags.

We hope that your parish will enjoy hosting an overseas visitor and find within the experience an enriched understanding of our share in the world church.