

Preparing for HA

People often rush into HA having been frantically busy finishing up their projects and handing over responsibilities. But a little bit of advance planning will help you get much better organised and make HA work better for you. Some well-organised sending organisations will even run a course training you for HA, which isn't as absurd as it might sound, since doing it well can be very effective for your ongoing ministry. If yours doesn't, you could ask them to start one. Or if you're independent, you might like to try asking a sending organisation if you can participate in one of theirs. Here's a list of some of the things you need to think about.

Finance. Often the cost of HA is high compared to life in the field. The cost of flight, accommodation, transport and general living may well be a problem. Some sending agencies deliberately hold back a proportion of support in field years to allow a fund to build up and finance home years. If yours doesn't do this, you can ask them to. If you're independent, try and save money towards HA. Alternatively, explain the problem to your church, or your supporters, and ask them to help you with it.

Set the date. Once you've decided to take HA, you need to figure out the timing. Fitting it in with your children's education is probably the most significant issue. You need to work out when is the best time to remove them from their school for a significant period and take them to what to them may be to them a 'foreign' country. You may also need to plan around births, weddings, significant family birthdays, and festivities such as Christmas. Remember that when you fly can have a large impact on the cost.

Plan your schedule. Many churches plan their calendar several months in advance, so if you want to be with them for several days and cover lots of different meetings, get the date set early. You will also need to get conferences and retreats in the diary fairly early. If you're going to be itinerant, try to set up a tour round the country, or parts of it, rather than zigzagging across it, or set up a base from which you can visit several churches.

Hand over your work. For most mission workers, this seems to be the very last thing they do. But in fact, it should be one of the first. As soon as you know when you're going on HA, you should be starting to wind down your commitments, advertising for personnel to provide HA cover if necessary, and training up your stand-ins so that they have plenty of time to get the feel of the role before you leave. Doing this successfully should give you more time to prepare for HA in the final weeks before you leave.

Set your objectives. Rather than just go on HA because it's expected of you, have an idea of what you want to achieve. Recuperation, skills enhancement, support development, family engagement and many others are all valid goals, but you may need to think through how your planned agenda actually moves you towards achieving these goals.

Arrange the details. Firstly, arrange your flights early, so they'll be cheaper. Decide where you're going to live – renting, lodging, moving around? If you're going to rent somewhere, you'll need to get your supporters to find somewhere suitable for you, and get it ready. If you're single, there may be an expectation that you live in other people's spare rooms, but does this actually meet your needs? What sort of transport are you going to need. Is it worth buying a car? Can you afford to

rent one? See our page '[The Syzygy Car](#)' for our helpful solution. What does your church/sending agency/family expect of you, and what do you expect of them?

Prepare your material. Don't think you can just plan your presentation the week before you need it. Plan it well in advance. Think through the various different groups you might present to (Sunday church meeting, prayer meeting, supporters' briefing, youth group etc) and what possible outcomes you are looking for. Design a general presentation which meets these goals, and have a number of minor variations tailored to each specific group. Make recordings and photos specifically to illustrate it – this is why you need some time. Make sure your photos don't show you in flashy restaurants, big cars or luxurious swimming pools, as these might give the wrong impression about your lifestyle and compromise your support. Remember to take home suitable props – musical instruments and clothing are good, as is food. Would anyone like to try some durian?

Buy your supplies. Remember to take things back with you as gifts for your supporters. Small craft items, booklets, paintings, or items of clothing can be light souvenirs which make a good token of appreciation.