

My Journey to Sri Lanka Starts Now - Blog Post by Gail Gastelu, The Tea House Times



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This adventure really began months ago, when the Sri Lanka Tea Board invited me. Since then there have been many plans, preparations, and details to attend to. As this is my personal blog, here you will read about my own experiences, the excitement, the fun, the anticipation, preparations, and jitters too. Just keepin' it real! You know. At times my entries may be a little bit TMI (too much information). Ha! But that's the fun of it.

So, let's rewind a bit. To prepare for a trip like this, if you have never been, there are many things to take care of well in advance. Such as immunizations, obtaining a visa, and packing of course.

Immunizations: This is entirely a personal thing and what you need may be different from what I needed, but this in itself was quite a learning experience. Did you know that if you need travel immunizations, they are unlikely to be covered by your health insurance and your doctor's office may not want to get involved at all? Many of my friends and family recommended a group called Passport Health. My doctor recommended another group but I went with Passport Health. No connection, just sharing my experience here. Honestly, wow! It was a great experience minus the little pinches of each immunization! Here's what it was like for me....

During my first visit to Passport Health, we discussed my itinerary and places I was likely to visit whether city or rural/remote and the answer was all! From there, the practitioner printed out and created a booklet for me that included information about the country, culture, current travel advisories, suggested immunizations based on CDC recommendations, foods to accept or avoid consuming while there, and much more. It was quite amazing. The booklet also included suggestions for away from home health insurance and/or travel insurance, different products I may need like mosquito repellent for body and clothing, certain types of medications to buy and prescriptions I must have with me such as Malaria pills and antibiotic.

The jitters. Oh yes! Of course! Silly but fun too, I wondered if I would get a lollipop after my visit. I wondered what kind of cool or ugly band-aid I might get while there! Funny, right? Well, come on! I'm a mother of two grown children and when they were young we had all kinds of fun band-aids like Sponge Bob or Barbie! So funny!!



I DID get a lollipop and cool safari band-aids! I'm not too skittish about shots so it did not bother me too much. I think worrying about potential side effects of certain immunizations is what bothered me most but I chose not to read the list of possible problems unless necessary; didn't want to begin imagining any! A couple of the immunizations I needed were each to be made in three separate

visits...spaced out over time...so you see, if you are planning a trip like this, you must plan well in advance.

Innumerable emails have passed between me and the Sri Lanka Tea Board. I must state again how incredibly professional, kind, and considerate they are with all their communications. And my dear friend Linda, my right-hand woman for this experience, has been very patient with me as I have bombarded her with questions about traveling so far away and what to bring and what to wear! You can only imagine the hysterical conversations we have had as I tried to determine my travel wardrobe to accommodate visits to tea fields but to professional meetings too. Our conversations have gone from the "Indiana Jones" pants I'm bringing on through to what shoes can function double-duty in the field and in a professional setting. We settled on just three pairs of shoes: 1 pair of schlepping shoes, 1 pair of flip flops, 1 pair of sandals (or my business-y looking flats). I'm cheating and bringing all four. Clothing is mix and match and very minimal since we anticipate full suitcases on the way home.

We applied for our visas here: <http://eta.gov.lk/slvisa/>

We also registered our trip here: <https://step.state.gov/step/> - - The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

That's the short story of preparing to visit Sri Lanka but gives you an idea of some important steps you will need to take if you ever go and I think you should! My next blog entries will be written while in Sri Lanka or as soon as I return early February. Ta for now!

For the Love of Tea. . .

Gail