

BON VOYAGE!

by Karen Holford



After 26 years, my husband Bernie and I are finally grasping the gravity of those innocent promises we made at our wedding. Five words—“for better or for worse”—cover a vast range of marital experiences! Some of our best (and worst) experiences have happened when we’ve been traveling around the world on ministry assignments, gathering a collection of souvenirs, memories, photos, and never-to-be-forgotten (and hopefully not-to-be-repeated) learning experiences.

This year the General Conference Session may have inspired some of us to accompany our husbands on the global Adventist pilgrimage. So let’s explore how traveling together as a couple can provide some of our “better” couple experiences instead of our “worst.” We may have no control over ocean waves, roadwork, accidents, air-traffic controllers, immigration officers, lost luggage, hotel cleaners, and the indefinable vegetarian menu served by the cabin crew. But we can still plan to make the most of the special couple-time we can have when we travel together.

PACK FOR SUCCESS

Organize your packing in advance and make sure you have clothing for every occasion. Katy packs each day’s outfit in a different bag, including her undergarments, hosiery, and scarves. Then she packs one pair of smart, comfortable shoes that go with all her dressy outfits and wears a pair of comfortable walking shoes for the journey.

Expect the unexpected. Take clothes for warm days, cold days, and wet days, even if you think you know the climate. Weather happens! And squeeze in some fitness clothes (bathing suit, jogging apparel, gymwear); exercise is especially important after a long day sitting around.

Wear layers for traveling so you can add and subtract according to changing temperatures. I once wore a warm woolen dress and thermal pantyhose when flying to teach in a hot country. It was cold when I left home and I was arriving in the middle of the night,

so my outfit made sense. But my luggage didn’t arrive until the last day! I had no adjustable layers and no time or money to buy anything new, so I had to wear the same hot clothes all week.

Fill your toiletry bag well ahead of time, and pack essentials in smaller plastic bottles or buy travel sizes. Include two new toothbrushes. I’ve lost count of the times my husband or I forgot our toothbrush because we planned to pack them at the last minute. Having two brushes means you can each have one if someone forgets their brush or if your luggage is lost or delayed.

Take first-aid items—your favorite pain relief, Band-Aids, antiseptic wipes, cystitis treatment (we’re much more vulnerable to this when we’re sitting still and not drinking enough fluids!), and supplies for stomach upsets, bites, etc. It’s very stressful and time-consuming to track these items down in a strange place in the middle of the night. Pack enough of your regular medications to last through the trip. Find out whether you need a doctor’s note to carry your medical supplies through certain security and immigration checks. Add sunscreen, sunglasses, lip balm, water-purifying tablets, mosquito nets, thermal underwear, and so on, to suit your destination.

Pack non-perishable healthy snacks like dried fruit or crackers, instant soups and drinks, nuts, etc. Unexpected delays and time schedules can prevent you from finding food. If you like hot drinks or soups, take a mini travel kettle with you for boiling water. Check any food import restrictions for the countries through which you’ll be traveling.

Take something (like needlework) that you’ll enjoy doing on your own if your husband has to work, study, attend meetings, or sleep.

If you’re flying, mix up your packing so that you have one outfit and half your underwear in your spouse’s suitcase. Pack essentials (such as contact lens supplies or diabetes medication) and valuables in your hand luggage. Check the security requirements for carrying fluids in carry-on luggage.

PLAN ROMANCE

Slip something in your suitcase to make your hotel room feel special. Try battery-operated candles for safety. Pack a pretty pillowcase from home or your favorite room fragrance. Find a book on massage skills and some fragrant massage oil and treat each other to a do-it-yourself spa experience. Add your favorite bubble bath and play relaxing music. Pack interesting nightwear that your husband hasn't seen.

PLAN ENTERTAINMENT

Find a travel version of a game you enjoy playing together or a pack of discussion-starter cards for couples; these items are great for long drives. Take two copies of a book you've been promising to read together so you can read in your own time. Download audio books and listen to them together. Ask each other:

- What did you like best about the story?
- What was the most important part of the story for you, or the most important theme or message?
- Which character in the story is most like you, or most like the person you'd like to be?
- What difference will this book make to your faith or the way you relate to others?

Travel can be tiring and stressful, so choose positive things to discuss. Talk about encouraging and happy things—your dreams for your life together and your ministry; how God is gently helping you to grow; plans for your career, home, and family, etc.

Visit airport shops and choose three things you'd like to give your spouse (if you had the money) and show them to each other; after all, it's the thought that counts! Play a subtle hide-and-seek game within a specific area. Agree on where to meet after 15 minutes if you haven't found each other. Discover kind and helpful things to do for fellow travelers to make their journeys easier. Open a box of chocolates and pass it around the waiting area.

Find a peaceful cafe in the airport and share one slow drink together. Need a quiet place to sit and the main lounge is crowded? Check out empty departure gates and set an alarm to make sure you don't miss your own flight.

PLAN ADVENTURES!

Find fun for free! Check out city Web sites and tourist offices for helpful insider information, discount visitor vouchers, free places of interest (churches, museums, galleries, markets, parks, specialty stores) and city travel passes. Borrow guidebooks from a library or purchase them from thrift stores. We've even downloaded clues for inexpensive "treasure hunts" as a creative way to discover an old town.

Take pictures of each other and ask people to take pictures of you, too. Make an album that tells the story of your travels; collect menus, tickets, and other souvenirs to add extra dimension to the pages. Choose a theme for your photos or capture sunsets, famous sites, places of worship, native flowers, people doing local activities, pictures of interesting doorways, or the meals you ate.

Do something you couldn't do in your own country. Eat different kinds of (safe) food. Discover where you can experience local traditions and music.

Choose small, simple, unbreakable souvenirs. Or start a collection on a theme—local fabrics to sew into your own crafts,

stones, shells, teaspoons, candles, candlesticks, books, pictures, ties, scarves, etc. I collect different hearts from around the world and use them to illustrate various aspects of God's love. Foodie gifts are great for friends back home; they say "we were thinking of you" without adding extra clutter.

If you're going to be with old friends, protect your couple time, too. It's so easy to socialize with your friends and leave your spouse feeling lonely. Aim to make the most of being together.

PLAN PICNICS

Save money with do-it-yourself meals. Buy sandwich ingredients, fruit, and local treats. Wash fresh food well in cooled boiled or bottled water. Buy disposable salad bowls, plates, flatware, and cups. Bring your own peeler, can opener, and vegetable knife.

Be creative! We once tossed a salad in a large plastic carrier and then ate it straight out of the bag (in the privacy of our hotel room)! Find interesting places to eat: by a fountain, under a tree, at a lunchtime concert, etc. Take plastic bags so you can sit on damp ground or suspicious-looking benches. Tablecloths can make picnic tables feel more welcoming.

PLAN FOR INSPIRATION


Take time to grow closer spiritually. Choose a book that will inspire you both. Pray together or hold hands and pray silently for each other. Look for inspiration all around you: evidence of God's protection and guidance, the hidden delights of nature, etc. Create your own mini-retreat. Look for ways to minister to others. Leave tips for those who serve you or a thank-you flower for the maid.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

If you get lost, agree to meet at the last place you specifically remember speaking to each other; it usually works! Or make a Plan B: "If we get separated, we'll meet at 1:00 p.m. by the information desk."

Above all, be honest with each other and consider each other's needs, especially as you're out of your regular routines. It's okay to say, "I need to stop and have a drink," "I need to sleep," or "It's lovely to meet up with old friends, but let's take this afternoon to do something with just the two of us."

Even with the best planning in the world, travel disasters happen. Don't blame each other. Make the best of the situation, see the funny side, focus on Philippians 4:8, and remember that one day, this disaster will be useful for a sermon illustration!

The most important thing is to enjoy your time away from housework, bills, emails, and endless phone calls and to use the gift of traveling time to bring you both closer together. 



KAREN HOLFORD has been traveling and ministering alongside her husband Bernie for over 26 years. One of her special memories is of getting hopelessly lost in Venice in the middle of the night after popping out of their hotel for a breath of fresh air. Lessons learned: Always travel with a map and enough money for a river bus home. And you're never really lost if you're together; you're just looking for new places to love each other!