

Tips for first-time travelers

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As you may have heard, the demand for traveling healthcare professionals is picking up. If you're in a job that no longer makes you want to leap out of bed each day, maybe it's time for a change. Traveling as a career option is exciting, and for those who've never done it, perhaps also a bit intimidating. Here are a few tips that, if you're considering traveling for the first time, will help ensure success as you sally forth.



Choose carefully. Interview several recruiters at different agencies, and work with the one or two that you feel most comfortable with. Be clear about your criteria in terms of location and work setting so that you don't end up on your first assignment wishing you were back at your old job. Depending on your personal tolerance for change, you may want your first engagement to be in a setting that is similar to what you've been accustomed to. Or you may be ready to shake things up and opt to stretch yourself by moving, for example, from an urban teaching hospital to a 40-bed facility in a rural community.

Plan ahead. Before you leave for your first assignment, investigate services and amenities you'll need while on location. If you're in a new community for 13 weeks or more, you might want to know where to find a good health food store, hiking trail, dog park, library, yoga studio, or hair salon. Also, research the facility where you'll be working to gain a sense of what to expect in terms of organizational culture.

Consider the weather. This may seem

like a small point, but when you're in unfamiliar territory, not having to slog through the snow or battle high heat and humidity to get to work each day can make a real difference in your attitude. Especially for your first engagement, choose a location with what you consider to be "good" weather, and be sure to get out and enjoy it when you're not working.

Think about housing. If possible, arrange for housing that's at least somewhat similar to what you're used to at home. For example, if you live in a four-bedroom home on 10 acres of land in the country, scheduling your first engagement in Manhattan (think 400-square-foot apartment with taxi noise into the wee hours) might result in a severe case of housing shock. For your first time out, a somewhat more serene environment might be a better choice. As you gain experience as a traveler and become more comfortable with the inherent unknowns, you may choose to be more adventurous. But initially, don't shock yourself if you don't have to.

Maintain a sense of normalcy. Make your first travel assignment as pleasant as possible by continuing to engage in activities that make you feel grounded and content. If you're a runner, keep it up while traveling (ask around at the hospital to find out who else runs, and where). If you love knitting, pack your needles and wool (you'll have downtime to relax). If volunteer work makes your heart sing, identify organizations in ad-

vance that can use your skills on a short-term basis (a great way to meet people in a new community).

Take advantage of your surroundings.

One of the big advantages of being a traveler is that you get to see the country. On your days off, resist the urge to stay in watching television or surfing the Internet. Explore the area, enjoy day or overnight trips, and partake in community events like fairs and festivals that occur while you're on location.

Be humble. First-time travelers make a good impression once they're on the job by demonstrating humility and by not being timid about asking questions. Even if you have decades of experience, it's important to remember that every facility is unique. Don't go in assuming you know everything, and be sure

to ask for clarification when you have any doubt about a policy or procedure. Demonstrating a high level of professionalism and showing respect for colleagues is a good strategy for earning high marks on your evaluation as a first timer—and for being asked to return for repeat assignments in

the locations you most enjoy.

I hope the tips in this short article have helped put your mind at ease and prompted you to consider traveling. If you're ready to explore the possibilities, visit natho.org to locate reputable recruiters who can help you land that first perfect assignment. **HT**

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TOOLS

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