

FILMING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES – PRE-PRODUCTION

Having a **local fixer**, however little they do, is a really good idea. Local knowledge is worth a huge amount. They can be someone to help when you need it on location – either before you arrive or once you are there. Translator, gofer, researcher, sound operator, driver... they come in many shapes and sizes and are generally invaluable.

Filming Permits - make sure you have a filming permit if you are going down the official route. If not, make sure you have an exit strategy if you are caught filming without a permit. Usually you can find out about filming permits from the consulate/embassy of the country where you plan to film in the UK. This can take anything up to 3 months or in some cases even longer, so apply early is a good rule to follow. Even if you do get a filming permit to film in the country you are visiting, this may not allow you to film everywhere – there are some buildings/parks/areas which are privately owned and you will need to apply to each location in turn for permission, in advance of filming.

Visas - Arrange Visas where required for the full team. If you are planning to film undercover, as a 'tourist', then you just need to apply for a tourist visa. If you are applying for a visa which allows you to work as a journalist/film maker this could take significantly longer, so allow extra time.

Carnet – depending on what equipment you are planning to use, you may need a carnet. A carnet is an international Customs document which allows the temporary importation of professional equipment to 40 countries which are part of the ATA Carnet system. Check www.londonchamber.co.uk/lcc_public/default.asp?id=204. If the country where you plan to film isn't a member of the ATA Carnet system, you need to find out what the regulations are for bringing expensive equipment into their country – you may need to lodge a temporary import bond; on the other hand, they may have no regulations at all and be very relaxed. It is important to check, however, otherwise your equipment could be impounded at customs when you arrive in the country.

Tickets - Needless to say, you will need tickets to travel to your filming location. Worth considering a ticket which is flexible, which may not be the cheapest option, in case your plans change.

Insurance – travel insurance is advisable in any situation, but if you are filming and want to insure the cost of the production you will need production insurance. This is usually calculated as a percentage of the total budget – normally 1-2%. Well known UK companies offering this include AON, Hiscox among others. You will need to call around and shop for a competitive policy.

Risk Assessment – James Brabazon covers this, but just to mention that you may need to complete one in order to get your insurance.

Excess Baggage – if you are carrying the equipment you need to film with you then it is likely you will be over on your 20-25kg/person baggage allowance. This can add a huge amount to your budget and should be included in your original costing. There are ways to persuade airlines to waive these fees – such as if you are filming a humanitarian disaster or such like, but you need to negotiate this BEFORE you get to the airport, usually a long time in advance and they will want evidence to support your application.

Accommodation – it may seem obvious, but if you are planning to carry valuable equipment with you, it sometimes pays to not stay in the cheapest hotel. Choose somewhere where security is good and you have a good electricity supply to charge up batteries. Also, access to telephones and internet can be very useful if you run into trouble.

Documents - Leave copies of all your important documents (passport, paperwork, carnet, contacts, schedule etc) with someone in the UK and if you are going somewhere hostile, make sure you have a method of checking in with them regularly.

Release Forms – you will need release forms for every person you interview and for all material which might be subject to copyright – this includes music, still photographs etc. There is a standard release form available from One World Media's website. In some instances it is really worth getting the release form translated into the language of the country where you plan to film. Just because someone may be in a developing country, possibly a refugee, that doesn't mean they have fewer rights. You will need to get your release form checked by any broadcaster prior to filming, to ensure it is legally binding and gives you all the rights you need.

Music – keep your ears open for local music when you are on location. It can be a really useful tool in creating an authentic local atmosphere to your piece. If you film a person playing music, such as a street musician, you must get them to sign a release form giving you permission to use the music in your film. It may be appropriate to pay them a fee for the use of their music. One question is, do they own the copyright to the music? If they don't, who does? You will need to clear usage with the copyright holder and this could be impossible. Traditional music is the easiest to use because it is normally free of copyright. For more information check www.copyrightservice.co.uk/protect/p07_music_copyright

Finally – before you leave, see if you can ask someone on the ground in the country where you plan to film to check your filming schedule and everything you have set up. This is invaluable, and makes sure that your schedule is viable (have you allowed enough travel time from A to B? does that train still run? Will it be just too hot/cold to film for 3 hours in the desert at midday? Etc)