

Survivors Speak: Surviving a Vacation

Part of the [“Survivors Speak” Tip Series](#)

We’ve worked a lot of disasters. But in September, 2014 a hurricane hit too close to home. While on a well-deserved vacation in Mexico, our Program Coordinator was caught in the path of Hurricane Odile. After being stranded for 5 days without power, running water, cell phone service or flushing toilets. Emily and her sister were evacuated by the Mexican Government and boarded a humanitarian flight to the United States.

Back home safe and sound, here are Emily’s preparedness tips for your next trip – be it work or pleasure:

- Always carry *at least* a flashlight, a first aid kit and a few energy bars and pick up a bottle of water when you land; you never know when you’ll be in an emergency situation. I also travel with a paperback book and a deck of cards.
- Check in with family when you arrive and update them if you change your plans. Also, make sure you leave a copy of your passport (if travelling internationally) with someone at home.
- If extreme weather or catastrophe hits, don’t forget what you already know. This isn’t just about staying calm but trusting that you know how to survive (focus on food, water, shelter and staying healthy)
- Learn the geography of your destination. No matter where you travel get to know the lay of the land – It would have been very helpful to have a paper map – not a Google map on a cell phone with low battery and no service.
- Be as flexible as possible – Information is always changing in disaster situations.
- Get creative: We didn’t have running water – and everything was dirty – so we used Vodka to clean our hands and plastic forks (we were lucky to be in an all-inclusive resort)
- Make Friends – Talk to those around you, ask what they are hearing about the situation. They may have found a solution or stockpile of something you need!
- Give your family contact info to those leaving before you. They can text or call your family when they get to a place with cell service and let them know you are okay.
- Don’t be afraid to leave your baggage. We didn’t know if we would be able to take our luggage on the evacuation flight (and it was a long walk to the pick-up point) so we left what we didn’t need.

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- Take care of yourself when you get home. Be aware that you survived something stressful that you will never forget. Seek support if you need help processing what happened.
- Share your story. You may be able to help someone else by sharing your story and passing along the lessons you learned.

My “just in case: packing list:

- flashlight
- whistle
- deck of cards
- paperback book
- cell phone battery backup
- make-up removing wipes (or baby wipes)
- first aid kit
- cash in small bills
- running shoes
- energy bars
- Emergen-C vitamins
- A map
- Business cards
- Pepto bismol