

Hi John & Maurice

Paul's words come to mind: "A great and effective door is opened, but there are many adversaries".

After many years of violent war between north and south Sudan, as well as between the various warring militias, there are far too many guns in South Sudan and a culture of violence. Juba itself is firmly under Government control and there is no problem security wise, there are plenty of Police patrols, and I recommend the Asante Hotel which is secure and did reliable airport pickups and drop-offs. It's not cheap, but nothing is cheap in South Sudan. There are far more expensive hotels but I'm not sure they offer much more apart from nicer rooms and cosmetics. You would be hard put to find a room for less than \$120 / night in a secure hotel (i.e. with high wall, barbed wire, security guards), and I'd not recommend a non secured hotel. Aweil is much safer, Joseph is keen we stay at his home next time, but there is also a hotel there.

There is no banking system much, credit cards can't be used, US \$ are the best currency, you can exchange for local currency (South Sudanese Pounds) at the hotels. The rate is much better in Juba than it is in the towns so do your changing there in Juba. You need to take plenty of cash with you in case of emergencies, although in the worst case there are Western Union agencies everywhere and you could ask someone at home to send you funds by WU for immediate pickup.

Malaria and Yellow Fever are endemic- you will need to have a Yellow Fever vaccination certificate in order to obtain a visa and many airlines demand you have the certificate before allowing you to board on leaving Juba. So ensure you get one (you need the jab anyway). You need to get a visa in advance, and this is problematic as most of the South Sudanese embassies demand you appear in person before them, and will not issue visas while you wait. They take a few days. For your first trip you can give 'tourism' as a reason, and book the Asante Hotel in advance as proof of accommodation and local contact. Asante are quite efficient in responding online. I'm not sure what South Sudan have by way of embassies in Australia and NZ, you'd need to look online. Apparently you can get the visa at their Nairobi or Kampala embassies, but you may have to wait three working days for it. There are plenty of international flights from both those cities to Juba and you can buy them online. There are also flights from Juba to Cairo, Dar and Addis.

Outside of Juba the only realistic way to travel is by air. The roads are hugely potholed and full of bandits and militias in many areas. The only safer way is by barge on the rivers to some destinations but this is very slow and takes days. Five days to Malakal on the Nile. 'South Sudan' is really Juba and the main towns which are accessible by air, much of the countryside is not under Govt. control and is in the hands of various militias and tribes of herdsman. Domestic air tickets can only be bought in South Sudan so you would need to Western Union money to our brethren for them to buy for you and get them delivered to your hotel in advance. Ensure you get to the airport in plenty of time. It is heavily guarded and only opens at about 6:30 a.m. which seems the time written for departure on all air tickets regardless of destination. The flights leave when they are ready to go, be prepared to wait some hours in the airport before flying. In all the various lines, including the one which forms outside the airport terminal before they unlock it, try to keep your place at the front of the line- there is no guarantee you will get a seat, it's first come, first served, so try to be at the front of the line for check in. Check in and security are awful, with various 'taxes' demanded, usually around the \$ 5 mark / 25 South Sudanese Pounds. Try to get plenty of smaller denomination bills, either US\$ or South Sudanese pounds. When you finally get through 'security' you will enter a small hall full of

people. There is no PA system nor monitors for information. Sometimes a man opens the door onto the tarmac and calls the name of a town- and if you want that flight, you must go. Be careful not to miss it as things are so hectic there, with planes and helicopters flying to so many places, that they just give you one chance and that's it. Seeing one doesn't know when their flight will be called, you have to just hang around as near to the exit as you can to hear your flight called. And be aware- flights are often cancelled. Ensure you don't have a connecting flight onwards the same day, as you really can't rely on these internal flights. If your flight is cancelled, it's worth going to the director of the airport to see if you can arrange a flight on a cargo plane. Most roads in between towns are unusable due to rebel militias and potholes in the rainy season, so there are lots of planes going hither and thither. My flight was cancelled and I got a 'charter plane', these are small 6 seater planes, you pay cash and get no ticket. You can't take much luggage on those things. I'd definitely avoid that option if you can, although the Lord preserved me quite fine.

The airstrips you fly to have at times been taken over by rebels, this has happened several times in Malakal, as whoever controls the airstrip controls the town. Don't be too fazed by this as the flight will not depart from Juba if there are problems the other end. And the Lord is our protector. Joseph says he can arrange flights with the UN, there aren't daily flights Juba-Aweil so this may come in handy if you are pushed for time, however these are often by helicopter and this takes a while. You also need to book with the UN 72 hours in advance- quite annoying if your flight is cancelled and there's a UN flight taking off to the same destination. In case you do hitch a ride in a helicopter, I'd take ear plugs with you, the noise levels in some of them are seriously damaging to your hearing without them. Many airstrips in S Sudan are dirt strips, not asphalted, so don't be worried if you put down on one, it's not a crash landing. Just ensure your seatbelt works and is fastened.

Photography is illegal without a permit from the local Police. It's best to be super discreet in taking pictures. With so much instability the security forces and Police are doing a good job of keeping control in the main towns, but they have to be quite tough about things like that.

There are so few Bibles in South Sudan because the postal service isn't working and the only way goods can get in is by DHL (very expensive and only to Juba) or by convoys of trucks from Uganda and Kenya. So do make full use of your baggage allowance to get literature in, although checking in the baggage and collecting it on the internal flights is a huge hassle. But this is what's needed to literally spread God's word here to eager people.

I suggest you make up an ID tag, about double the size of a credit card, it can say something meaningless like 'Carelinks Ministries Mission in South Sudan' with your name, passport number, address etc., put a passport size photo in it, and have it dangling around your neck all the time. This is what most white people do, it apparently discourages kidnappers and opportunistic thieves. Maybe get some T-Shirts made up to wear that have 'Carelinks Ministries' written clearly on them. People have a great respect for priests / pastors and that comes in useful sometimes here. That said by God's grace I had no problems whatsoever and never felt threatened, the people are really lovely natured and not so grasping for money as one finds in some other parts of Africa.

Malakal is a rather unique situation as it's effectively a garrison town. Most people there are in the security forces. It's cut off by Darfur to the West, Northern Sudan to the North, and rebel militias on the other sides. When you arrive at the airstrip they will take your passport and register you, when you leave you go through the same, and have to get a letter from the Police releasing you to leave

Malakal, this costs about 40 \$. The hotel whose conference room we used and whose manager was our translator to Arabic [a very good guy- named Duncan!] is right on the Nile so that is the logical place for baptisms. But there is a curfew on going near the river bank after 6 p.m. as they are looking out for rebels landing by boat at night. There is a better hotel where I stayed- 85 \$ / night but no running water nor electricity. Reasonable food. No internet. Next to the army barracks so quite secure and the bar is a hang out for the officers. Br Amos there is a real solid reliable brother and person. The new brother Martin out at Renk is likewise, just he's 2 – 3 days journey by boat away from Malakal. He and Amos are contactors and have travelled widely in the rural areas and have a lot of contacts interested in baptism. I would trust their judgment and if you go there, then let them arrange an itinerary for you. Martin is really a lovely brother as is Amos. He is going to look into you chartering a speedboat to travel to Renk, which would take about a day. Rather than 2 or 3 days on the barge. The speedboats have a covered seating area where you can rest, the barges are open to the air and very slow. If you could get there and take literature with you, this would be a great mission and truly take Christ to the regions beyond. My sense is that Malakal is one of the more difficult towns in S Sudan, Juba and Aweil are not so paranoid.

Please please don't be fazed by the security situation, it really is fine, and there are stacks of white UN workers going all over the place. I seriously believe there may be hundreds to be baptized. There is little opposition to our teaching, people are eager to learn and receptive. I wouldn't urge you to go if I considered the security situation to be too awful. You just need to be aware of it and to act and plan with caution and with the Lord's blessing all will be OK.

My prayer is that you will take up from where I have had to leave off, but a huge door has been opened. In Aweil particularly, Joseph is very very open to being taught, he has a good Bible knowledge and all we say falls well into place with him, and he has access to many people really eager to learn and respond, many of whom are coming for the first time to Biblical Christianity or even to Christianity per se from Islam. I really really encourage you to persevere with all the problems these places present and go for it.

God be in your planning,

Duncan