

Travel in Times of Terrorism, War, and World Uncertainty

Overview

Information and guidelines for planning a trip and traveling safely during times of war and world uncertainty.

- Planning ahead so you know what to expect
- Thinking through your backup plan
- Staying safe when visiting abroad

You may be planning a trip in the coming days or weeks for business or personal reasons. You are likely to enjoy a safe trip to most countries of the world. Airline travel is probably safer than it has ever been, because of security measures taken since September 11. However, during times of war and world uncertainty, it is important to keep in mind that a security situation could deteriorate rapidly, affecting services in the country or place that you are visiting. Planning ahead will help you manage if you experience a delay, can't get a return flight or train, or your personal risk increases due to an emergency.

Planning ahead so you know what to expect

Leaving home will be easier if you plan ahead, gather information, and prepare for the unexpected. For example, it's important to know what to do if your trip is delayed or changed due to world events. These resources can help you make decisions and plans before you leave:

- *Check with the U.S. State Department for up-to-date travel advisories and information.* Go to www.travel.state.gov for country information and travel warnings. If you do not have access to a computer, the State Department, Bureau of Consular Affairs, offers a phone service for travelers on weekdays, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST at 888-407-4747. Be prepared to hear a long voicemail. (Don't use this phone line for an urgent matter.)
- *The Overseas Security Advisory Council is probably the best "one stop" site for information on country situations.* In collaboration with the U.S. Department of State and private business, it posts informative summaries of local and political events and their impact on travel and business throughout the world. The Web address is www.ds-osac.org.
- *For information about airport delays due to weather and other factors, go to www.fly.faa.gov.*
- *For detailed country-by-country information, visit the Web site of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, at www.fco.gov.uk.* See the section on travel for country advice and travel warnings.
- *"Hot spots," an online publication of Air Security International, also has helpful information about travel and travel advisories.* The Web address is www.airsecurity.com/hotspots.htm.

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- *Many embassy Web sites offer helpful country-by-country profiles and travel information. Canada's is especially helpful. Go to www.voyage.gc.ca/main/sos/ci/v-en.asp.*
- *Consult a good book about travel safety. One good resource is John Grady's *Travel Security and Safety Awareness*, (Vision Publications, Ltd.).*
- *Keep personal papers in a safe place. Plan to keep all vital documents such as birth and marriage records, vaccination, insurance, and bank records in one accessible location, preferably with your family at home. Make sure that your passport and necessary visas are valid. If you are traveling with your passport, keep a photocopy with you and leave another photocopy with your family at home.*
- *Have backup plans in place for child care or if you are caring for an older or dependent relative.*
- *Plan to bring sufficient funds to deal with an emergency. Cash is best. Carry your bank cash card, travelers' checks, and at least two credit cards as well.*
- *Pay for your travel with a credit card. Ask the company or carrier about policies pertaining to cancellations or changes. Often this information is available on Web sites. If a trip is cancelled, the card issuer will generally return your money. (If cancellation occurs mid-trip, however, there are usually no refunding guarantees.) Purchasing refundable tickets, though more expensive, is also a solution. Notify your credit card company that you will be making purchases in the countries where you are traveling.*
- *Register and remain in contact with the consulate office nearest to your destination city. Obtain this phone number and e-mail address before you leave. Learn who among the officers deals with traveling American citizens. For information about U.S. embassies, see travel.state.gov/links.html.*
- *Before you leave, confirm your plans. Contact your tour operator, travel agent, or airline to confirm travel arrangements and gather more information about country issues.*
- *If you have a choice to accept or decline to travel, make your decision based on what feels comfortable, safe, and right for you. This is a very personal decision. If you are very worried about the risk of travel, talk with your manager about your concerns and about the possibility of not going. If the State Department recommends refraining from travel due to world events, weigh whether this recommendation is right for you.*

Keep in mind that the risk of being a victim of an act of terrorism is extremely low. The fact is that road accidents are the single greatest cause of death for Americans abroad, according to risk experts.

Thinking through your backup plan

- *Be sure your family and close friends know where to reach you during your trip.*
- *Before you leave, consider alternative travel routes.* This includes other airports that could be used for departure and arrival and also other airlines.
- *Avoid taking the airline's last flight of the day.* Continuous delays throughout the day can leave travelers for the last flight stranded.
- *When vacationing, keep your options open.* If you are traveling for pleasure, buy refundable tickets and make hotel and rental-car reservations that can be canceled without penalty. It is easy to make last-minute travel arrangements in most cases, so consider waiting out any concerns or uncertainty you may feel. Note that most cruise companies have liberal cancellation policies.
- *Consider purchasing travel insurance.* Travel insurance to cover cancellation of your trip is a good idea. Supplemental travel insurance to cover the possibility of changes in plans due to terrorism is available from only a few carriers, such as Travel Guard International or Access America/Allianz. If war breaks out, the coverage does not apply. If you are interested in insurance, talk with the broker about the difference in conditions relating to terrorism versus war.
- *In the event of an emergency, find out if your credit card company has services.* Some have a hotline you can use to arrange for medical care, extra cash, etc. Call now to find out.
- *Pack a small emergency or evacuation bag to take with you when you travel.* You will keep this with you on the airplane or train. The bag should include: water and nonperishable food, a cell phone, photocopies of your passport and exit visa, eyeglasses and/or contact lenses, toothbrush and toothpaste, extra cash, a compact flashlight, and a first-aid kit.

Staying safe when visiting abroad

Be alert and smart about travel in a foreign country. American visitors are welcome in most parts of the world. But a heightened state of awareness is important.

- *Register at the consulate office or embassy.* Introduce yourself to the people with whom you spoke before leaving home. Ask for a country update and any other information that will help you assess any risks to carrying out your travel plans.
- *Carry your personal identification papers on your person at all times.* This includes your passport, driver's license, and any other important documents.
- *Use transportation services provided by the hotel.* Especially for transport to the airport or areas that are unfamiliar to you, use a chauffeured service.

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- *Understand the country's phone system.* Carry a calling card and know how it works, or carry exact change in the country's currency. Identify the nearby computer cafés where you can send e-mail to friends and family back home.
- *Avoid gathering at American entertainment spots or restaurants.* Generally, plan to dress as the local people do, be respectful of local customs, and behave in a low-key way. Avoid large crowds of Americans or pubs or places popular with Americans.
- *Contact the consulate office or embassy for instructions during a country emergency.* If events develop in such a way that you become concerned about possible evacuation, be sure to check with the consulate office or embassy. Be sure they know how to reach you.

By planning ahead, having good information about your destination, and being careful and alert about your activities when you are traveling, you will have more peace of mind during the time you are away from family and friends.