

# Safety without borders

Keeping your staff healthy and safe abroad



IOSH publishes a range of free technical guidance. Our guidance literature is designed to support and inform members and motivate and influence health and safety stakeholders.

### Safety without borders – keeping your staff healthy and safe abroad

This guide will help you manage the health, safety and welfare issues your staff may face when they're posted abroad or travel on business trips.

As well as covering the preparations you need to make as the employer, *Safety without borders* includes checklists for your staff to use before and during their trip.

This guide refers to working and travelling in a range of countries. You should be aware of the legal requirements and systems of the countries your employees are likely to be sent to.

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PDF versions of this and other guides are available at [www.iosh.co.uk/freeguides](http://www.iosh.co.uk/freeguides).

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# 1 Introduction

Globalisation and the search for new business opportunities are encouraging many organisations to send more and more staff abroad on business. This guide covers some of the issues that you need to consider, whether you're sending staff on short business trips or posting them overseas for longer periods. It also gives some useful contacts that can help you manage the health and safety of staff while they're away.

Getting health and safety right won't just protect your staff while they're travelling, either. It can also make a difference to your organisation's profitability – for example, by reducing downtime and losses. Reputation is vital in international markets, as well, so how you look after your staff while they're in other countries is doubly important.

For more on how you can use health and safety to drive down losses, boost productivity and build your reputation, take a look at IOSH's Life Savings campaign at [www.iosh.co.uk/lifesavings](http://www.iosh.co.uk/lifesavings).

Good health and safety often goes hand in hand with good quality, too. Organisations with poor health and safety records often find that quality suffers\* – basically, if they're willing to take shortcuts in one area, they probably will in others. On the other hand, if your staff are healthy and safe while working abroad, they'll also be well placed to produce top quality work.

If you're planning to expand your organisation's operations into another country, there's a lot to consider. Creating and satisfying a demand for your products or services is just the beginning – you need to manage the safety of your staff and your assets abroad. Issues facing safety practitioners or the people they're advising include:

- deciding whether staff need to be posted abroad and, if so, how many
- learning how best to travel to the country and what life will be like
- planning for your organisation's transition to or operation in another country
- finding specialist support abroad
- learning what the country's health and safety culture and priorities are
- establishing how local laws and standards compare with those in your home country
- reviewing your organisation's staff policies
- dealing with cultural and language difficulties
- deciding how you're going to manage health, safety and environment enforcement in your overseas operations, and who's responsible for it.

*Safety without borders* has two parts. The first is aimed at safety practitioners, managers and directors responsible for staff who travel overseas on business. It looks at commonly encountered issues, highlighting personnel hazards and associated risks. There's also a working abroad action plan (pages 12–13). Once you've been through the action plan and agreed what you need to do, you can include the results as part of a risk assessment for individual travellers.

The second part – *Safety without borders – employees' guide* – contains a series of checklists for travelling employees. It gives advice on what they need to do before they go, as well as how to stay healthy and safe once they've arrived.

Both sections cover all kinds of international business travel, from a trip lasting a few days to a longer placement lasting months or years.

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\* Turner B A, Pidgeon N, Blockley D and Toft B. *Safety culture: its importance in future risk management*. Position paper for the Second World Bank Workshop on Safety Control and Risk Management, Karlstad, Sweden, 1989.

## 2 Your international policy

Health and safety standards vary between countries and regions. This is a significant challenge for multinational organisations that want to maintain operational standards. You can achieve consistency either by using a third-party accredited standard or by establishing an internal international standard within your organisation.

Internal standards can be based on one of two principles:

- the health and safety standard of the organisation's home country, with additional, more stringent requirements where required
- the standards of the country with the most stringent health and safety requirements in which the organisation operates.

Organisations with good governance will have health and safety policies which state their general duties and responsibilities. You'll need to extend these to cover duties and responsibilities to employees working in countries that aren't where they usually work. Remember to include the employee's responsibilities as well.

It's important to consult the right people in your team about your international employment and travel policy before it's finalised, especially those with international experience (possibly from earlier in their careers) who can share best practice and lessons learned. The policy should cover both brief trips and long term assignments.

The policy may simply state that the organisation's 'duty of care' standards in the home country will extend to wherever the employee travels on business, and that it will provide information, training, support and equipment to protect the employee's health, safety and welfare at all times.

In addition, you may want to consider whether:

- the workplace itself is a reasonable place to send staff
- the building your staff will be using is suitable
- your employees know what risks to look out for and how to minimise them
- your employees are competent to do the work you're asking of them
- your staff are appropriately supervised locally
- you know enough about the working environment and risks involved.

Wherever you're sending employees to promote your business or sell your products, you need to consider the country's culture. Understanding the obvious pitfalls of language and translation, as well as customs, mannerisms, beliefs and personal presentation, not only reduces the risk to your employees – it can also help your business.

In many countries, religion is a major influence on how people get things done. Make sure you brief your staff on religious differences, customs and laws so that they can avoid causing offence. It's probably wise to avoid scheduling business trips during religious festivals – apart from anything else, these tend to be holiday periods.

To make sure your organisation's international safety strategy is effective, you need to learn from past trips and change the policy to take account of any lessons learned. It's therefore vital to hold debriefing sessions for staff who've returned from overseas trips or postings, so that they can contribute to your future policy and training provision.

## 3 Looking at country-specific risks

When operating a business in another country, you must always meet the health and safety standards of that country. Although the European Union (EU) is at the forefront of developing and adopting a common framework of health and safety laws across its member states, even here there are still differences between countries and even across regions of the same country. The same can be said about the United States, where different states have different requirements.

You may find it helpful to refer to the International Labour Organization's guidance – see [www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/cis/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/cis/index.htm). Aim to reduce risk to your staff as much as possible – you need to be able to justify your actions through your risk assessments.

Before deciding to enter a country on business, explore what risks may be present and what you can do about them. For long term postings, on top of obvious health and safety risks, consider certain social issues, because

they can affect employees' overall adjustment to life outside their home country and therefore their mental wellbeing. You may need to think about:

- the economy, currency movements, management of expenses and any bribery culture
- religious differences and religious laws (for example, laws on dress code and alcohol consumption in some countries)
- social structure and the employment of women and children
- living standards, salary payments and tax
- industrial, employment, fire, and health and safety law
- educational facilities
- coverage and reliability of phone, email and postal services.

There's useful overview information for most countries of the world at [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html).

### International risk assessment

Some points to consider:

- whether your international policy covers all the people, places and activities involved
- the risk profiles (see page 05) of the individuals you're sending overseas (and of their families, where relevant)
- political, medical and security risks of the countries involved
- infrastructure and contacts in the countries involved
- cultural awareness and training
- travel planning and vaccination schedule
- personal safety and security training
- communications arrangements
- details of accommodation
- travel within the country, including driving
- information management
- contingency and emergency strategy and response
- debriefing strategy.

## 4 Before your staff travel

When travelling or working abroad, employees must be aware of important differences that will influence their activities. The risks of foreign travel generally stem from the language barrier, the traveller's unfamiliarity with the location, health risks, local customs, internal security or political instability, and transport infrastructure. Most first-time business travellers will think as tourists and not understand that business travel is different and has different risks. As a responsible employer, assess each country your employees visit for these risks. Make sure that business travellers get good advice and the support they need to protect themselves.

### Risk profiles

A risk profile is an individual risk assessment for an employee who's going to be working abroad. As well as general travel-related elements, it should include specific personal circumstances that could affect their health and safety while abroad, such as disabilities or medical conditions.

### Insurance

You need to arrange suitable insurance and make sure the insurer is aware of the reason for travelling. The policy should cover 'routine' travel risks, including flight problems, lost luggage, additional transport costs and medical emergencies (personal accident, local medical costs and repatriation). Insurance should also cover major international travel disruption caused by natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and bad weather, as well as civil and political unrest.

Agree the amount of cover with staff in line with your policy, taking account of any international agreements on medical care. For example, EU citizens can use a European Health Insurance Card when travelling in the EU to access the same level of medical care that citizens of the country they're visiting are entitled to. They do, of course, still need travel insurance.

### Clothing and luggage

If your staff need special clothing or equipment, you must pay for it. You can get advice on what your employees may need from travel agents and specialist outfitters.

### Accommodation and settling in

Around a third of expatriate assignments are unsuccessful. A common reason is that employees don't adapt well to their new environment. Staff posted overseas need to become familiar with local living arrangements, such as housing, schooling, utilities and banks. There are specialist companies which can help plan, prepare and support relocation arrangements – get more details from the Association of Relocation Professionals' website, [www.arp-relocation.com](http://www.arp-relocation.com).

It's best to book hotels that have been recommended. If possible, find out about the area and building so your staff know what to expect when they arrive.

### Medical and dental checks

Your government can tell you whether your staff will need any vaccinations or anti-malaria tablets. If they do, you must pay for them. Sort out vaccinations well in advance – some need to be given several weeks before travel, others can't be given together, and they may produce side effects that need treatment. Some countries require proof of vaccination before they'll let travellers enter. The WHO has a vaccination certificate form that you can use if your own medical service does not have an appropriate form – download it from [www.who.int/ihr/IVC200\\_06\\_26.pdf](http://www.who.int/ihr/IVC200_06_26.pdf).

Find out more about vaccinations and health from:

- The WHO ([www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/))
- the UK Department of Health ([www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk))
- the US Centers for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel))
- The European Centre for Disease Control ([www.ecdc.europa.eu](http://www.ecdc.europa.eu)).

### Preparation for travelling

For help preparing overseas trips, try contacting:

- business travel agents
- airlines, shipping lines and rail companies
- your own country's consulates
- foreign consulates and embassies in your home country
- large international hotel chains
- the government department responsible for foreign affairs in your own country, eg the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK ([www.gov.uk/fco](http://www.gov.uk/fco)), the US State Department ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)) or the European Commission ([http://europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/index_en.htm))
- private security organisations
- organisations with branches in the target country
- Chambers of Commerce
- your country's government department responsible for trade and industry (eg UK government business webpages [www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk)) and the European Commission's business pages ([http://ec.europa.eu/policies/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/policies/index_en.htm))
- world satellite television in your own language can be useful (eg BBC World, CNN, CNBC, Al Jazeera and Russian News)
- local newspapers and business publications
- the International Meteorological Office
- people in your organisation who've had experience of the country you're visiting.

# 5 Communications

Consider how best to keep in touch with your travelling employees. This depends on the business you're in, but as a minimum you should be able to contact your staff at specific times, and they should be able to communicate with their base when they need to.

Arrange a timetable for your staff to contact you to let you know they're OK. Make sure they get in touch even if they have nothing to report.

Many countries don't have good communication networks in outlying areas, although even the less well-developed countries have reasonable networks around larger cities. If you give your staff a company mobile phone, make sure it'll work in the country they're visiting. Get advice from travel companies or mobile phone service providers.

Satellite phones are an alternative to the standard mobile system. Although they're expensive, they allow a person or vehicle to be tracked and give coverage in areas where standard mobiles don't work.

## Using mobile phones abroad

If you're planning to give your staff mobiles to use abroad, check that:

- they're suitable for international roaming
- the handsets will work in the relevant country
- you've given your staff a suitable adaptor for the charger
- there's enough credit on the phone to cover international calls
- you have a back-up communication plan if the phone is stolen or the network fails – for example, check that your staff can send and receive faxes at their hotel.



## 6 Personal health

International travel can expose your employees to a range of health hazards, including from food, water, the climate and endemic diseases. The outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and swine flu around the world showed that it's also possible for illnesses to be spread very fast by international travel. However, your staff may be reassured to know that there's very little risk of infectious diseases being spread through aircraft ventilation systems. This is because intake air is heated to 250 °C and recirculated air is passed through a high efficiency particulate filter.\*† Illnesses are most likely to spread through close contact with people who are coughing and sneezing, so good personal hygiene is always the best defence.

It's vital to consider appropriate health measures well in advance of setting up an organisation overseas, or at least two months ahead of a staff visit or posting. You may need to get specialist medical advice on a range of personal health matters, including:

- local medical contacts (doctor, hospital, dentist, clinic)
- personal medical and dental insurance
- facilities and local agency contacts for medical evacuation
- personal medical kits
- health guidelines for travel abroad (see, for example, [www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad](http://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad) and [www.who.int/ith/en](http://www.who.int/ith/en))
- health briefings and checks before departure
- how to deal with the problems of long flights and other long journeys, such as joint and muscle ache, swollen ankles, increased risk of deep-vein thrombosis, ear pain and disrupted sleep patterns
- vaccination records
- post-visit debriefings and health checks.

A medical check-up is a good starting point – it's essential to identify any potential current healthcare risks. Encourage your staff to book appointments with their doctor, dentist and any other relevant practitioners (including your in-house occupational health team, if you have one). The advice they get should take into account any existing medication and how travelling may affect health problems.

Get specialist medical advice on extreme climate precautions at least six weeks before travelling. Extreme conditions include very high and low temperatures, but also don't forget the dangers of altitude differences. People can start to suffer from altitude sickness at around 2,000 metres† if they're unused to being at that height. The problem is often worse if you fly into a high location than if you travel there by road or rail, where you're able to acclimatise as you go.

Make sure staff know what to do if there's a medical emergency. Encourage them to keep emergency contact numbers close at hand. Find out whether there's someone local, such as an agent or partner, who can speak the local language and could help your staff in an emergency.

### Personal medical kits

Depending on the destination, you may need to provide:

- a basic first aid kit
- isotonic drinks or tablets
- water purification tablets or filters
- sun protection
- diarrhoea treatment
- insect repellent
- a mosquito net
- anti-malaria drugs
- antihistamine tablets or cream.

If hospital standards are low, you may also need to provide a sterile medical equipment pack containing:

- hypodermic syringes
- dressings
- sutures
- blood plasma
- single-use thermometers.

\* ECDC. *Risk assessment guidelines for infectious disease transmitted in aircraft*, TER0906, 2009.

† WHO. *International travel and health*, 2011 (chapters 2 and 3).

## 7 Local travel

Plan in advance how your staff are going to get around when they arrive. Driving in some countries can be particularly risky because of poor roads or a high crime rate – in these cases, hire a reliable local driver if possible. If your staff are going to drive themselves, give them information on local traffic laws and the state of the roads before they go. If you can, book hire cars and drivers in advance, too.

If your staff use public transport, get hold of route plans, timetables and, if possible, tickets before they travel. Also

find out how the local transport system works – do you buy tickets before you travel or on the bus or train? Do you have to validate the ticket? Many transport providers show real-time travel information on their websites – make sure your staff know where to find this.

Remember to arrange transport for your staff from the airport. Ideally, get someone from the local office to meet them personally, but if this isn't possible, ask a local contact to recommend a taxi firm.

## 8 Personal security

There are a number of security risks your staff could face when working abroad, ranging from violent attack and kidnapping to extortion and petty street crime. It's advisable to arrange security briefings for travellers. Outline the recommendations in a security policy or plan. Briefings should be low-key, balanced and carefully constructed, with an emphasis on avoiding risks. They should cover:

- the security background of the country and the immediate region of the site or business area
- the cultural background (including religious influences and customs) and standards of social behaviour
- crime and the police (including how to approach the police, what they'll listen to, the extent of their influence and local power)
- personal security awareness and procedures at work, at home and on the move
- security resources that residents can call on.

Training in risk prevention (avoiding being a target and limiting exposure to theft, mugging and con tricks) not only boosts the traveller's confidence, but is essential for minimising risks to your staff while they're abroad.

If staff are travelling alone, make sure their line manager or buddy knows when they're due to arrive at various destinations during their trip – including when they arrive safely back home or at the office.

If several people are travelling together as a team, it's a good idea to make one person responsible for the team's safety.

### Personal security training

You may feel that your staff would benefit from training in keeping themselves and their belongings as safe as possible. Here are some likely topics to cover:

- preparation and packing
- planning journeys
- planning where to stay
- diary and communications
- medical and first aid considerations
- departure planning
- dealing with opportunistic and targeted bribes and extortion
- avoiding drugs and contraband
- safety and security at the destination airport
- how to meet a contact driver
- public transport, hotel shuttles and taxis
- security in hotels and residences
- driving, car-jacking and road rage threats
- muggings, including pre-emptive measures
- harassment by street traders, vagrants and beggars
- dealing with the local embassy or consulate.

## 9 Crisis management

Even the best planned and organised trips can go wrong for reasons beyond anyone's control. It's important to plan your reaction to this kind of event in advance.

Disruption to business can be caused by natural disasters, accidents, outbreaks of disease, political unrest, crime or economic instability – and they can all lead to emergency situations. For your business to deal with a crisis effectively, you need to develop workable strategies, policies and systems to minimise the impact. These should include training and regular reviews to make sure they're still effective.

Also consider how you can help if your staff's travel is disrupted. Is there another way for them to travel if their flight is cancelled? Can you easily increase the limit on corporate credit cards if staff need to pay for extra accommodation or travel? You could also keep an electronic copy of your staff's passport and travel tickets at the office, so that they can be emailed if necessary.

Follow these simple steps:

- analyse your business
- assess the risks
- develop the strategy
- develop the plan
- rehearse the plan.

Developing a business continuity plan will help you to avoid financial losses, protect your employees and your property, meet legal requirements, avoid loss of market share, and reduce negative publicity.

## More information

### Business and travel

Association of British Travel Agents Ltd (ABTA), 68–71 Newman Street, London, W1T 3AH  
t +44 (0)20 7637 2444  
[www.abta.com](http://www.abta.com)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Travel Advice Unit, Consular Directorate, Old Admiralty Building, London, SW1A 2PA  
t +44 (0)870 606 0290  
f +44 (0)20 7008 0155  
[www.gov.uk/fco](http://www.gov.uk/fco)

*Travelling Safety Tips* from Maiden Voyage who work with safety organisations and the transport and emergency services to provide travel safety tips and advice  
<http://maiden-voyage.com/Tips.aspx>

UK Trade and Investment Enquiry Service, Kingsgate House, 66–74 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6SW  
t +44 (0)20 7215 8000  
[www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk](http://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk)

### Medical and health

Department of Health, Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2NL  
t +44 (0)20 7210 4850  
[www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)  
See also Health advice for travellers at [www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad](http://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad)

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 171 83 Stockholm, Sweden  
t +46 (0)8 5860 1000  
[www.ecdc.europa.eu](http://www.ecdc.europa.eu)

National Aids Trust (Advisory Service), New City Cloisters, 196 Old Street, London, EC1V 9FR  
t +44 (0)20 7814 6767  
[www.nat.org.uk](http://www.nat.org.uk)

National Travel Health Network and Centre, Hospital for Tropical Diseases, Mortimer Market Centre, Capper Street, Tottenham Court Road, London, WC1E 6AU  
t +44 (0)20 7387 9300  
[www.nathnac.org](http://www.nathnac.org)

Terence Higgins Trust Helpline (advice and counselling on HIV/AIDS issues), 52–54 Grays Inn Road, London, WC1X 8JU  
t +44 (0)20 7831 0330  
[www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

Travel Health Information Services, 20 Oaklands Way, Hildenborough, Kent, TN11 9DA  
[www.travelhealth.co.uk](http://www.travelhealth.co.uk)

World Health Organization factsheets, available from [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/en](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/en)

### Health and safety

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Gran Via 33, 48009 Bilbao, Spain  
<http://osha.europa.eu/OSHA>

European Network of Safety and Health Professional Organisations  
[www.enshpo.eu](http://www.enshpo.eu)

Health and Safety Executive  
[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)  
Priced publications available from HSE Books: [www.hsebooks.com](http://www.hsebooks.com)

International Labour Organization, 4 route des Morillons, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland  
[www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

### Culture

CIA World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

Executive Planet – information on international business culture and etiquette  
[www.executiveplanet.com](http://www.executiveplanet.com)

Lonely Planet Travel Guide Books, 72–82 Roseberry Avenue, London, EC1R 4RW  
t +44 (0)20 7841 9000  
[www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

### Personal security and crisis management

Continuity Central (business continuity news and information), Portal Publishing Ltd, PO Box 1393, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD1 9TN  
t 0845 644 1110 (from UK)  
t +44 1484 300750 (from outside UK)  
[www.continuitycentral.com](http://www.continuitycentral.com)

Environment Agency. *Prepare for a flood and get help during and after.* Available free online at [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/32354.aspx](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/32354.aspx)

UK Resilience. *Communicating risk.* Available free online at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/communicating-risk-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communicating-risk-guidance)

### Communications

Telecoms advice information sheets. Available free online at [www.telecomsAdvice.org.uk/infosheets/mobile\\_guide\\_using\\_mobile\\_phones\\_in\\_business.htm](http://www.telecomsAdvice.org.uk/infosheets/mobile_guide_using_mobile_phones_in_business.htm)

# Working safely abroad – action plan

This action plan isn't exhaustive, but it offers you a starting point as you develop your international travel policy.

Topic	Yes/No	Action/notes
<b>About the country your staff are visiting</b>		
Are there formal political links with your country?		
Is there political or social instability?		
Are there notable religious customs or laws?		
Are there notable legislative differences?		
Are phone and postal systems reliable?		
Is the transport system reliable?		
Is there a drug problem or bribery culture?		
<b>Insurance policy</b>		
Does it provide a replacement car?		
Do your staff have individual risk profiles?		
Does it cover medical bills?		
Does it include air ambulance cover?		
Does it cover return flights for employees' families?		
Does it cover repatriation if workers die or are injured?		
<b>Medical provision</b>		
Have your workers had medical/dental check-ups?		
Have they had any necessary vaccinations?		
Have you prepared a medical kit for them to take?		
Do they have supplies of prescription drugs?		
Do they have spare glasses/lenses and solution?		
<b>Finance</b>		
Have you given your staff an expenses advance?		
Do they have the right currencies?		
Do they have credit/debit cards?		
Have you arranged to settle bills through a travel agent?		

Topic	Yes/No	Action/notes
<b>Personal security</b>		
Have you given a security briefing?		
Do your staff have a named contact to meet?		
Do they have instructions to contact base regularly?		
Do they have details of high-risk areas to avoid?		
Have they had risk avoidance training?		
Have you produced an itinerary for them?		
<b>Accommodation</b>		
Have you used it before or has it been recommended?		
Have you made a security check?		
Have you checked its quality?		
<b>Travel within the destination country</b>		
Have you given your staff a cultural briefing?		
Do they need an international driving permit?		
Have you arranged a hire car (and driver)?		
Do they have health and safety awareness information?		
<b>Contingency and emergency arrangements</b>		
Have you done a threat assessment?		
Are there plans to cover flight delays?		
Is a mobile or satellite phone available?		
Have you set up a 24-hour contact schedule?		
Do you have local medical contacts?		
Do you have an incident management team?		
Do you have emergency evacuation plans?		
<b>When your staff return</b>		
Have you debriefed your staff about their trip?		
Have you shared any lessons learned?		
Have you updated your policy on that country?		

# Safety without borders – employees' guide

## Before you go

### 1 Your destination

- Check with your government that there are no warnings about travelling to your destination (for example, see [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk), [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) or <https://dss.un.org/dssweb>).
- If someone you know has visited your destination before, ask them for advice.
- Buy a good guidebook and familiarise yourself with the country's geography, transport, culture and so on.
- Learn some basic phrases in the local language if you can, and consider using a phrasebook.

### 2 Documents

- Carry a valid passport that has at least six months left before it expires, and has two spare pages for entry stamps.
- Check whether you need a visa at least two months before you travel – you can do this at travel agents or on embassies' websites.
- Make sure your employer has arranged travel insurance for you, and check that the cover is right for where you're going and what you're doing.
- Remember to take the policy with you, and make a note of the emergency phone number.
- Always take several forms of identification and keep them separate from your passport. Take photocopies of your passport (including the page that shows your visa) as well. If possible, scan them too and keep a copy with you on a USB stick.
- If you're staying for a short time, buy a return ticket before you leave your home country.
- Check your journey and check-in times against a prepared itinerary and reconfirm flight times a couple of days before departure.

- Avoid quick changes on flights or trains, especially if you have to wait to reclaim your bags.
- Use a flexible ticket if you're travelling to a higher-risk country.
- Find out whether you need an international driving permit and if you do, apply for one in good time.

### 3 Medical and dental checks

- Make sure that any urgent medical or dental treatment is completed before you travel.
- If you have any long term health problems, check with your doctor whether travelling will make them worse, and remember to take enough medicine with you.
- Make sure any medication you're taking is legal in the country you're visiting.
- Find out what vaccinations you need, and have them done in good time. Some vaccines can't be given together, and if you suffer side effects, you'll need time to have them treated.
- Remember to get a vaccination certificate if you need one.
- Take a look at [www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad](http://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad) or [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel) for the latest health advice.
- Carry a record of your blood group and any other important medical information (eg allergies).

### 4 Clothing and luggage

- Get advice (eg from colleagues or an experienced outfitter) about what clothing and luggage is suitable for your destination. Remember your organisation should pay for any special clothes.
- Dress casually for travel and keep expensive watches and jewellery out of sight.

- Use suitcase locks so that it's clear if your luggage has been tampered with – there are some available that show whether the security services at the airport have officially opened your bags.
- Keep a list of what's in your bags.
- Put your name and address or a business card inside your luggage in case the label falls off.
- Avoid using soft-sided bags as they're easier to break into.
- Pack some spare clothes in your hand luggage in case your main suitcase is delayed or lost in transit.
- Avoid hurting your back – don't overfill suitcases, and use luggage with wheels and trolleys where they're available in airports.

### 5 Money

- If you're unfamiliar with local coins and banknotes, get used to them and learn their equivalent value in your currency before you set out.
- Avoid carrying a large amount of cash, but carry enough money to cover emergencies. Keep it in various places to make sure you don't risk losing it all at once.
- Keep your funds in a variety of forms – cash, traveller's cheques (preferably in an international currency, such as US dollars) and payment cards.
- Avoid forms of payment that aren't commonly used where you're going. For example, check whether credit or debit cards are widely used before you go.
- Avoid using debit cards, as they don't have the same level of protection as credit cards.
- Make a list of emergency phone numbers for all cards and traveller's cheques, and cancel them if they're stolen.
- Keep spare money, valuables and your passport in the hotel safe, and make sure you remember the security code.



## 6 Communication

- Note the phone number of your nearest consulate and carry enough coins in the local currency for several calls. It's often easier to buy a phone card for using in public call boxes.
- Report regularly to your home base – even if you're just calling to say everything's fine.
- If you're planning to take a mobile phone, check before you go that it'll work in the country you're visiting.
- Make a note of your phone number, the handset serial number and the helpline you need to call if the phone is stolen.

## Personal health

### 7 Vaccinations and diseases

You can prevent most diseases you're likely to come across by getting vaccinations in your home country – see 'Medical and dental checks' on page 14. But you need to be careful once you've arrived, too – especially to avoid getting malaria or rabies.

#### *Malaria*

Malaria is a major health problem in developing countries with tropical and sub-tropical climates. It affects around 300 million people a year and is one of the world's most significant causes of death. It's caused by a parasite that enters the bloodstream when the victim is bitten by an infected mosquito. The symptoms are fever alternating with chills and shivers, often similar to flu-type illnesses. There is no vaccination and no cure. Protection comes in two forms: preventing the mosquitoes biting by using insect repellents and mosquito nets, and killing the parasite by taking anti-malarial drugs.

#### Malaria prevention checklist

- Cover exposed skin, particularly after dark.
- Use insect repellents and follow the manufacturer's instructions on how often to apply them.
- Use mosquito nets over beds, and screen windows and doors.
- Burn anti-mosquito coils or wear repellent arm or head bands.
- Spray rooms with insecticides before sleeping.
- Sleep in an air-conditioned room.
- Don't take siestas outside except under a net.
- Take anti-malarial drugs exactly as stated on the prescription. Complete the course to make sure the parasite doesn't develop (some cases of malaria occur when travellers stop taking the drugs too soon when they come home).
- Treat any flu-like symptoms or fever within three months of your return as suspicious and ask your doctor about them.

#### *Rabies*

Rabies is a viral infection usually transmitted by an animal's saliva entering the body through a bite or graze. Once the symptoms appear, it's invariably fatal. The best way to protect yourself is to avoid contact with animals, since rabies is endemic in many countries.

There's a vaccine, but it can have unpleasant side effects. Getting vaccinated before you travel is recommended only if you're going to a high-risk area.

If you're bitten by any animal, get help immediately – you need to have the vaccine as soon as possible.

## 8 Food and drink

Many infectious diseases (eg cholera, hepatitis A, B and E, listeriosis and typhoid fever) are transmitted by contaminated food and water. The local standard of safety depends on how food and drink are prepared and handled. Some simple precautions can reduce the risk significantly:

- eat only food that's been thoroughly cooked and is still hot
- avoid cooked food kept at room temperature for several hours
- avoid food bought from street vendors
- avoid uncooked food, apart from fruit and vegetables that can be peeled or shelled
- boil water for drinking or brushing teeth if you're unsure of its safety. If you can't boil it, use a disinfectant tablet or a certified and well-maintained filter, or stick to bottled water
- avoid ice unless you know it's made from treated and chlorinated water
- cold bottled and packaged drinks are usually safe, as long as they're sealed. Hot drinks are also usually safe.

## 9 Illness abroad

- If you're ill abroad, it's important to tell someone locally about it, even if it doesn't seem too serious. If your condition suddenly gets worse, you may be unable to find help.
- If you take drugs that you've bought locally, make sure you double-check the translation of usage and dosage instructions.

## 10 Medical provisions

- If you're taking prescription drugs with you, make sure you have enough for your trip and take a note signed by your doctor saying what they're for – they may not be available or recognised locally.
- Take a first aid kit for minor cuts and bruises.
- If you're visiting somewhere with poor medical care standards, it's a good idea to take a medical kit with basic sterile equipment (syringes, sutures and dressings).
- If you wear glasses or contact lenses, consider taking spare pairs, packed separately.

## 11 DVT and travelling

There's some evidence to suggest that sitting still with little or no exercise on long journeys may increase the risk of deep-vein thrombosis (DVT). If you're overweight or take the contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy, you may also be at greater risk from DVT. You can reduce the risk by:

- exercising your feet, ankles and lower leg muscles regularly during the journey
- wearing compression stockings
- getting up and walking around, if it's allowed
- drinking plenty of water.

## Once you're there

### 12 Hotel safety

- If possible, find out about the hotel and the area it's in before you arrive.
- Avoid ground floor rooms.
- Always lock the door and use the safety chain and window locks if fitted.
- Use the spyhole, if there is one, before opening the door to someone, and phone reception if you're unsure who's there.
- If your room doesn't have a chain or spyhole, ask to change to a room

that does. If you're staying for a longer period, consider moving to a hotel that has these features.

- Find the nearest fire alarm and extinguishers, and make sure you know your emergency exit route. Follow the emergency route to the final exit and make sure you can actually get out of it easily.
- Carry a personal fire/security alarm that can be fitted to your room door so that it'll sound if the door opens or it detects smoke.
- Keep important and valuable items (including computer files) in the hotel safe when you're not in your room.
- Avoid keeping large amounts of cash in your room.
- Get reception to call you if you have visitors and meet them in a public area rather than your room.

### 13 Culture

- Look up guide books or websites to find out about local traditions, customs, laws and culture.
- Learn the local language or at least take a phrasebook.
- Respect local customs and dress codes. For example, it's illegal to import or consume alcohol in some countries. Consider what to wear to fit in and dress appropriately, particularly when visiting religious sites, business contacts and rural communities.
- Avoid haggling aggressively or for too long. In most countries where haggling is common practice, it's done with humour – remember that the discount may be significant to the seller, even if it's relatively small to you.
- Be discreet when expressing views on cultural differences – take care not to make offensive comments about customs of dress, relationships, alcohol and drugs.
- Ask for permission before taking someone's photograph.

### 14 Driving

- Carry an up-to-date driving licence and insurance documentation.
- Understand local driving practices and ask about bad driving habits, such as for giving way and overtaking. Check on local police methods and carry money for fines.
- Carry a local map, be aware of 'no go' areas, and plan the route thoroughly.
- Learn some useful local phrases in case you break down or have an accident.
- Ask to inspect and try out a hired vehicle before accepting it – ask for a demonstration. Remember to check tyres, brakes, oil and water levels.
- Make sure there's enough fuel for your journey and check ahead for petrol stations on long journeys.
- Drive unobtrusively and be observant, particularly of following vehicles. Note familiar landmarks.
- Lock the vehicle even if you're leaving it for only a few minutes, such as when refuelling. Keep the passenger doors locked while driving. Leave nothing valuable inside.
- Carry emergency equipment (eg fire extinguisher, first aid kit, tool kit, spare bulbs and warning triangle) in the vehicle. In many countries, this is a legal requirement.
- Don't get out of the vehicle if you're unsure of your surroundings, or if you're involved in an accident that appears in any way contrived.
- Be wary of locals pointing out 'problems' with the car. Carry on to the next busy public place to inspect the vehicle.
- The police in some countries aren't always sympathetic to travellers. If possible, tell your office that you're going to the police station before you go. Don't give the police your passport unless you have to – try to use some other form of identification such as an ID card or driving licence.

- Make sure that you take lots of water with you if you're driving in a hot climate. It may be impossible to walk very far to get help if you break down.
- Always leave enough room between you and the car in front to drive out if you're approached by potential hijackers.
- Don't wind your car window down fully when speaking to strangers.
- Don't drink and drive. Some countries have lower limits than your home country.

### 15 Taxis and drivers

- If you're not confident about driving or there's a high risk of car-jacking or kidnap, hire a reliable driver.
- If possible, book taxis through your hotel or a reliable local contact.
- Make a note of the taxi company and the driver's name, car registration, make and colour, and the approximate fare when you book, and check them again before you get into the taxi.
- Travel in a licensed taxi with a meter, and make sure the driver uses it.
- Don't get into a cab if there's another passenger already there.
- Taxi drivers could take criminal advantage if they see a passenger as a newcomer – act naturally and don't ask too many questions.
- Always ask drivers who are to meet you at the airport to use your organisation's logo on the meeting card. (This makes it harder for other people to copy your name and try and get your attention before your official driver.) Before getting into the car, make sure they know your name and either put your luggage in the boot yourself or watch as the driver does it.

### 16 Personal security

- Phone a contact at your home base regularly to let them know where you are, where you're going and when you expect to get there. Always make sure your contact knows your plans, including any last minute changes.
- Carry a copy of emergency contact names and phone numbers, including details of your country's consulate and your credit card company's hotline.
- When travelling, make sure you know what route you're taking in advance and how long you expect the journey to take.
- If you have a meeting or you're away from your base, tell your hotel or another contact person when you expect to return.
- Be aware of 'no go' areas and stay away from them. Keep to well-lit streets and always walk on the outside of the pavement, purposefully and confidently.
- Don't display obvious signs of wealth, such as expensive watches or jewellery. Keep clothing simple and businesslike and don't dress like a tourist – avoid carrying a camera round your neck.
- Wear a shoulder bag across your body, not just over one shoulder.
- Avoid walking around alone if possible, and be aware of who's around you.
- Don't get a map out in public – walk into a shop or a hotel lobby and then look at the map.
- Be particularly alert for pickpockets on public transport and in crowded areas.
- Be alert with strangers and cautious in conversation. Don't give away personal information.

- Avoid making eye contact with strangers and be wary of people asking you whether you've dropped something.
- Never agree to carry packages out of the country for people you don't know, and never leave your luggage unattended.
- Carry two wallets or purses. Prepare one as a 'dummy' to be handed over if you're threatened – it should contain around US\$50 and some local currency, together with a couple of old receipts, expired credit cards and a few banknotes from your home country. The other one is your real wallet or purse – keep this safely on your body and only carry the money you need for one day.
- Don't carry weapons.
- Take a good pocket torch in case of power cuts.
- If you're going to a potentially unstable country – even for a short stay – always register with your country's consulate.
- Keep copies of important documents and information – including your passport, insurance policy, 24-hour emergency numbers and ticket details – in a safe place.

### 17 Incidents and accidents

- If your luggage has been tampered with, report it to the police immediately.
- Never take on a mugger – quickly give them what they demand. Ideally, hand over your 'dummy' wallet or purse.
- If you're robbed or have an accident, report it to the police – even if they can't do anything, you'll need the crime number to claim on the insurance.

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