

Travel Safely When You Go Overseas

When you travel overseas, odds are you'll have a safe trip. Yet crime and violence, as well as minor difficulties, do happen to Americans abroad. The consular officers who work in the more than 250 U.S. embassies and consulates around the globe receive calls daily from people in distress. Use these tips to avoid problems on your trip.

Dress conservatively to avoid being a target. Never wear expensive-looking jewelry. Both a flashy wardrobe and one that's too casual can mark you as a tourist.

Always travel light. You can move more quickly and will have a free hand. You'll also be less tired and not have to set items down or leave them unattended. Carry the minimum amount of valuables and always conceal them. Passports, cash and credit cards are most secure in a hotel safe. When you must carry them, hide them in several places rather than putting everything in one wallet or pouch. Avoid handbags, fanny packs and outside pockets—easy targets for thieves. Interior pockets or a sturdy shoulder bag with the strap worn across your chest are better. A pouch or money belt worn under clothing is safest.

Pack an extra set of passport photos along with a photocopy of your passport information page to make replacing your passport easier if it's lost or stolen. Put your name, address and phone numbers inside and outside each piece of luggage. Use covered luggage tags to avoid casual observation of your identity or

checkmate

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nationality. If possible, lock your luggage. Don't pack anything you'd hate to lose, such as valuable jewelry, irreplaceable family objects, credit cards you won't use, your Social Security card and similar items.

Before you leave, check the Department of State's Consular Information Sheet for the country you're visiting. These describe entry requirements, currency regulations, unusual health conditions, the crime and security situation, political disturbances, areas of instability, and information about driving and road conditions. They also provide addresses and emergency phone numbers for U.S. embassies and consulates. In general, the Sheets do not give advice; instead, they describe conditions so travelers can make informed decisions. In some dangerous situations, however, the Department recommends Americans defer travel to a country. In that case, a Travel Warning is issued for the country in addition to its Consular Information Sheet. Public Announcements offer information about relatively short-term and/or transnational conditions posing significant risks to the security of American travelers. They are issued when there is a perceived threat, even if it doesn't involve Americans as a target group. Public Announcements have been issued to deal with short-term coups, pre-election disturbances, terrorist violence and anniversary dates of specific terrorist events.

You can access this information 24-hours a day on the internet at <http://travel.state.gov>; by calling (202) 647-5225; sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Office of American Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC 20520-4818, or visiting a regional passport agency.