



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

TRAVELLING WELL



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A must see destination.

CONTENTS

BEFORE YOU GO – BE PREPARED	4
TRAVEL INSURANCE	5
PASSPORTS AND VISAS	8
RESEARCH AND PLAN AHEAD	8
STAYING SAFE	11
REGISTER BEFORE YOUR TRAVEL	11
RESEARCH YOUR DESTINATION	11
MONEY AND VALUABLES	12
LOCAL LAWS AND CUSTOMS	12
DUAL NATIONALITY	13
STAYING HEALTHY	14
HEALTH CHECKS	14
VACCINATIONS	16
ADDITIONAL HEALTH TIPS	17
USEFUL LINKS	20
RECIPROCAL HEALTH AGREEMENTS	21
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS	22
GETTING HELP OVERSEAS	22
INSURANCE COMPANIES	22
CONSULAR SERVICES	22
COUNSELLING SERVICES	23

Australians are travelling overseas in ever-increasing numbers. Whatever your age and destination, properly preparing before you leave and staying in good health while travelling can help you to have a happy and enjoyable trip.

This brochure is designed to provide travel tips and health information to help you prepare for a safe and healthy journey. It should be read in conjunction with the *Travel Smart: hints for Australian travellers* and, if applicable, *Travelling Seniors*, *Travelling Parents*, *Travelling Women* or *Backpacking Overseas* publications.

When you travel abroad, you leave behind Australia's support systems, emergency service capabilities and medical facilities. The Australian Government will do what it can to help Australians in difficulty overseas, but there are legal and practical limits to what can be done to assist travellers in other countries. You should have realistic expectations about this and read the Consular Services Charter, available on smartraveller.gov.au, before you go.

BEFORE YOU GO – BE PREPARED

The better prepared you are,
the safer and more enjoyable
your travel will be.

If you are travelling in an organised tour group find out what arrangements are made on your behalf and what you need to arrange for yourself.

Do some research on your destinations, make sure you have the necessary documentation, information and items you will need. Start with the latest **travel advice** for your destination at smartraveller.gov.au. This will give you information on the main risks you may face and some precautions you can take. Also check out the latest guidebooks, talk to other travellers and organise comprehensive **travel insurance**. Make sure you **register** your details at smartraveller.gov.au before you leave, so you can be easily contacted in an emergency.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Regardless of how well prepared,
healthy and fit you are -
if you cannot afford travel insurance,
you cannot afford to travel.
Overseas medical costs
are not covered by Medicare.

You are strongly advised to take out comprehensive travel insurance. You should make sure it covers all medical expenses for injury or illness, as well as theft of valuables, damage to baggage, and cancellations or interruptions to flight plans. Fully disclose any pre-existing medical conditions in writing. It will save you worry and possible financial hardship. Medical costs overseas can be in the tens of thousands of dollars and many families have been burdened financially in paying these costs.

Shop around when choosing an insurance policy and make sure the cover provided suits your needs and is valid for the whole time you will be away. **Always read** the Product Disclosure Statement carefully and ensure that you understand exactly what your travel insurance covers.

Be sure to confirm all details with your insurance provider and receive written confirmation of your policy.

If you are planning to rely on **the travel insurance provided by your credit card**, you should, before travelling, obtain written confirmation that you are covered and of what exactly the insurance covers.

You may be able to obtain travel insurance for yourself and your immediate family or travelling partner under the one policy. Cover, however, varies from policy to policy

Cruise passengers
are strongly encouraged
to take out travel insurance
appropriate to their circumstances.

Medicare benefits are only payable to cruise passengers if you are travelling between two Australian ports. They are not payable for journeys between an Australian port and a foreign port or between two foreign ports.

Do not base your decision
to take out insurance
on the assumption that
'it will not happen to me'.
Accidents do happen.

Case Study

Richard was a young Australian working in a US ski resort after travelling around the world. He had taken out travel insurance to cover his planned 12 months away. After earning enough money to stay on as a guest at the resort, he decided to defer his return to Australia by a week. Richard enjoyed skiing and the night life so much that he forgot to extend his 12-month comprehensive travel insurance policy, which expired three days before his return to Australia. On his second last day at the resort, he was hit by a car while crossing a road on his way to the ski fields and suffered serious head injuries. He was admitted unconscious to intensive care. A month after the accident, when Richard's family organised his return home, he was still in coma and could only be moved on a stretcher. His medical evacuation alone cost his family \$80,000.

If you extend your stay overseas,
make sure you contact your insurer
in time to extend your cover.

For further information, guides on travel insurance for travellers are available from:

- Insurance Council of Australia at www.insurancecouncil.com.au
- Financial Ombudsman Service at www.fos.org.au
- Australian Securities and Investment Commission at www.fido.gov.au

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Your passport is your most important travel document. All Australian citizens must have a valid passport before leaving Australia and maintain a valid passport while overseas. All children travelling overseas, including newborn infants, must have their **own passport**. More information on Australian passports can be found at www.passports.gov.au or by calling the Australian Passport Information Service on **131 232** in Australia.

Be aware that countries have different passport validity requirements. Make sure your passport has **at least six months validity** from your planned date of return to Australia. Carry extra passport photos just in case your passport is lost or stolen and you need to replace it while away.

Find out early what visas you need by contacting the relevant foreign mission (embassy, high commission or consulate) of the countries you intend to visit. Remember to check the visa requirements of countries you might be transiting. Contact details can be found in the White Pages or online at www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html.

RESEARCH AND PLAN AHEAD

Simple research and preparation before you leave can save you a lot of hassle.

- **Airlines** – if you are concerned the airline may question your fitness to fly we recommend you obtain a letter from your doctor stating that you are fit for air travel.
If you have a disability, call your airline to find out about services provided including shuttle services, seating arrangements and special meals.

If you need to carry needles and syringes on to the plane, obtain a letter from your doctor explaining why you need them and seek early advice from your airline on how to comply with enhanced airport and air travel security regulations.

- **Medication** – if you are travelling with medication, needles or syringes make sure it is legal in the countries you are visiting by contacting the relevant foreign mission in Australia. Contact details are available at www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html.

If you need to travel with large quantities of medication, it is good practice to separate the quantity between your luggage, in case bags go missing. Keep all medications in the original, labelled container to avoid customs problems.

Make sure you carry a copy of a letter from your doctor explaining what the medicine is and stating it is for personal use only.

- **Accommodation** – if you are travelling with children or independently it is recommended that you book your accommodation prior to arrival, especially if you are due to arrive at your destination late at night.
- **Luggage** – protect yourself against loss and theft by carrying minimal pieces of luggage. Overloaded, you make yourself more vulnerable to bag snatchers and pickpockets. Secure credit cards and passports under your clothes or in a money belt.

Information on luggage security and safety is available from the Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority at www.casa.gov.au and the Australian Government's travel security website www.travelsecure.infrastructure.gov.au.

If you are travelling to the USA, make sure you familiarise yourself with their specific airline baggage lock requirements. Information is available from the United States Department of Homeland Security's at www.tsa.gov.

- **People with disability** - remember that not all countries provide the same level of support for people with disability as is found in Australia. Therefore, it is important to plan ahead:
 - > Book direct flights where possible and when making bookings allow plenty of time for any necessary transfers between planes or other forms of transport.
 - > Contact the local tourist authority to find out if the public transport system at your destination will provide you with adequate access.
 - > Contact relevant foreign missions to check rules and regulations about any items you are travelling with, such as a wheelchair, equipment/aids or medication.
 - > Do not make assumptions about your accommodation. Check that it is suitable for you before you arrive.
 - > If any of your aids need electric current, check the voltage used in the country you are visiting. Also check which adaptors are needed as plug configurations do change from country to country.

STAYING SAFE

There are a number of practical steps you can take to avoid running into difficulties and dangerous situations overseas.

REGISTER BEFORE YOUR TRAVEL

Registering your personal and travel details on smartraveller.gov.au before you travel is highly recommended. If you do not have access to the Internet you should telephone **1300 555 135** to register. It will make it easier to contact you in an emergency, whether it is a natural disaster, civil disturbance or family issue. The registration information you provide is protected by Australia's strict privacy laws.

RESEARCH YOUR DESTINATION

Find out about the political, cultural and economic environment of your destination so you will know what to expect on arrival. Consult the travel advisory for your destination at smartraveller.gov.au and either purchase a guide book or search the internet for recent information.

When organising how you will get around overseas, check out the local travel section in our travel advisories at smartraveller.gov.au and read our travel bulletin on “**Overseas Road Safety**”.

Be aware that the safety standards you might expect of transport and tour operators, including adventure activities, are not always met. Sufficient safety equipment may not be provided and recommended maintenance standards and safety precautions may not be observed.

MONEY AND VALUABLES

Always protect yourself against loss and theft of your money and valuables.

You should:

- organise a variety of ways of accessing your money overseas, such as credit cards, travellers' cheques and cash
- check with your bank whether your ATM card will work overseas
- register with your bank the period you expect to be travelling
- never leave your credit card out of sight
- make two photocopies of valuable documents such as your passport, tickets, visas and credit and ATM cards. Keep one copy with you in a separate place to the original and leave another copy with someone at home.

LOCAL LAWS AND CUSTOMS

Familiarise yourself with and show sensitivity to local customs.

In some cultures people are deeply offended by revealing or inappropriate clothes. Breastfeeding in public may also be considered offensive. Purchase a guide book or search the internet for information on local customs and laws and consult the travel advisory for your destination at smartraveller.gov.au.

Be aware that local laws and penalties, including ones that may appear harsh by Australian standards, apply to you. Age or health concerns are not valid excuses. Many countries apply capital punishment, including for narcotics related crimes. Every year, many Australians of all ages are arrested overseas on drug charges.

DUAL NATIONALITY

Being a national or citizen of more than one country is called dual nationality.

Some countries offer citizenship to people who marry their citizens, or to persons whose grandparents were born in that country. You should be aware that if you have dual nationality it may have implications when you visit the country of your second nationality.

You may be prevented from obtaining Australian consular assistance if the country you are in considers you to be one of its citizens.

If you hold another country's passport, seek advice about using it. Take your Australian passport and use it **to depart from and return to Australia**.

For further information, get a copy of the publication *Travelling dual nationals* available from smartraveller.gov.au.

STAYING HEALTHY

HEALTH CHECKS

Make an appointment with your doctor or travel clinic for a basic health check-up at least six to eight weeks before you depart to find out if any vaccinations or further health checks are required.

It is recommended that if you need medication you:

- discuss with your doctor the medication you will need to take
- carry a letter from your doctor detailing what the medication is, how much you will be taking, and stating that it is for your own personal use
- leave the medication in its original packaging so it is clearly labelled with your name and dosage instructions.

Take along a spare pair of glasses or a copy of the prescription as they can be easily lost or broken.

If you are taking Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medication with you, be aware that since the National Health Act was amended in 1999, it has been an offence to carry or post PBS medicines overseas, unless it is for personal use. Additional information is available from www.health.gov.au or by phoning the PBS information line on 1800 020 613.

More information on travelling with medication is available from www.medicareaustralia.gov.au or by phoning the Overseas Drug Diversion information line on 1800 500 147.

Take enough medication to cover the length of your trip. If you need to purchase locally, be careful not to buy imitation or counterfeit medications and prescription drugs. Be aware that packaging and labelling may be similar to those available in Australia, but the strength and active ingredients can vary.

Always check the strength of a medication with a doctor. Do not buy off-the-shelf medication even if an Australian doctor has prescribed it, as strengths may vary from country to country.

If you have to inject your medication, it may be preferable to carry your own needles and syringes, if it is authorised in the countries you are visiting. If you have to buy them overseas ensure they are sealed and sterile.

If you have pre-existing medical conditions you may wish to purchase a Medic Alert bracelet or necklace to wear while travelling. They are available at chemists in Australia. Medic Alert Foundation keeps a database of patients' details and medical history, and is accessible by phone worldwide +61 8 8274 0361 or www.medicalert.com.au.

VACCINATIONS

It is important that you discuss your personal travel plans with a health professional to ensure you have the correct vaccinations for your trip and any booster doses of childhood vaccinations you may need.

Vaccines can prevent you from contracting some diseases, but it is also important to remember that:

- new vaccines are constantly being released but diseases continue to evolve
- it is never too late to vaccinate, however some vaccines require a long period to take effect and more than one dose may be needed
- you may need boosters for childhood vaccines
- health risks within a country can vary from one region to another and local authorities may be slow to announce outbreaks of disease
- new diseases can appear suddenly, as happened with the outbreak of the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza. Check the latest travel advice and travel bulletins for your destination before you depart and while travelling so you can ensure you have the latest information
- common illnesses that travellers can pick up include those which result from unsafe sex and eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Find out whether tap water and local food is safe to consume before you depart
- there are a number of mosquito-borne diseases you can contract while overseas, particularly in tropical areas. Be sure to take measures to avoid being bitten such as wearing light coloured, loose fitting clothing that covers your arms and legs, regularly applying an appropriate insect repellent and staying in mosquito-proof accommodation.

To find out more about healthy travel and vaccinations visit:

- World Health Organization – www.who.int
- Immunise Australia Program – www.immunise.health.gov.au
- Travel Clinics Australia – www.travelclinic.com.au
- The Travel Doctor (TMVC) – www.tmvc.com.au or www.traveldoctor.com.au.

ADDITIONAL HEALTH TIPS

- If you are prescribed anti-malarial medication, take it as directed e.g. prior to leaving, while in risk areas and when you return.
- Make up a small medical kit, including items such as headache tablets, antacids, antiseptic lotion, cotton wool, band-aids, latex gloves, safety pins, SPF 30+ sunscreen and an appropriate insect repellent.
- If your trip will involve an increase to your usual physical activity, such as a lot of walking, gradually build up your fitness (after receiving clearance from your doctor) weeks, or preferably months, before you depart.
- Find out whether essentials are readily available at your destination. In some countries supplies of feminine hygiene products, nappies and contraceptives, including condoms, can be unreliable or unavailable, so it may be best to stock up before you leave.
- Do not try to save luggage space by combining medications into one container. Keep all medication in the original container to avoid problems with Customs officials.

Case Study

Don and Claudia and their best friends Chris and Louise were talking and dreaming about safaris and climbing Mount Kilimanjaro for over twenty years. Time had come to realise their dream. Their travel agent had arranged tailored comprehensive travel insurance for all their needs. Their doctor had cleared their fitness and health conditions for their challenging trip to East Africa. They had a supply of medication for their respective minor health conditions and left Australia feeling well-prepared. After having a fabulous time on safari in Kenya, everyone was looking forward to their climb up Kilimanjaro. Knowing that steep climbing triggers his asthma, Don put a ventolin respirator in his backpack and another one in the pocket of his trousers. On arrival at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro, the tour guide told his group to leave their backpacks, drinks and all non essential equipment in the bus as everything needed would be provided on the way to and back from the summit. About one third through the climb Don started to feel short of breath and realised that it was time to use his respirator to regain his breath. He could not find the one he had put in his pocket and started to get very worried because he had not taken the spare one from his backpack. He kept slowing down and breathing more heavily. Claudia realised what was happening and immediately gave him the spare respirator that she always carries. Don had fully recovered after ten minutes and reached the summit with his friends. Claudia's simple planning ahead avoided a potential medical emergency for Don and the group was able to continue and enjoy their holiday together.

In the air

- Keep important medication with you in case your luggage goes missing.
- Continue taking your prescribed medication.
- Factor the effects of jet lag into your itinerary.
- If you have been scuba diving, do not travel in an aircraft for at least 24 hours after your final dive.
- To help avoid deep vein thrombosis (DVT):
 - > drink plenty of fluids (but avoid alcohol and caffeine)
 - > stretch your feet and lower legs while seated
 - > walk around the cabin at regular intervals.

On the ground

- Exercise within your limits - especially in hot climates.
- Where local tap water is not safe:
 - > only use bottled water to drink and brush your teeth and always check the seal
 - > do not put ice in drinks - freezing preserves germs, rather than kills them
 - > avoid uncooked food, including salads and fruit that you cannot peel
- Include rest time in your travel itinerary.
- Wear comfortable shoes, a hat and sunscreen for sightseeing.
- Wear a pair of thongs when showering.
- Always take spare medication when going on excursions.
- Practise safe sex as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are widespread in many countries.

USEFUL LINKS

– Yellow fever

Yellow fever is a viral disease of short duration and varying severity that is transmitted primarily by various mosquito species. With few exceptions, vaccination is recommended for all travellers to countries or areas where there is a risk of yellow fever transmission. For more information visit www.health.gov.au.

– Pandemic (H1N1) 2009

The Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus has spread throughout the world. Your travel plans could be disrupted due to public health measures introduced in response to the spread of the virus. For more information visit smartraveller.gov.au and www.healthemergency.gov.au.

– HIV/AIDS

For more information on the spread of HIV/AIDS, visit www.who.int/topics/hiv_aids/en/

– Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

DVT can occur on long flights but simple actions can reduce the danger. For more information visit:

- > Civil Aviation Safety Authority – www.casa.gov.au/airsafe/trip/
- > Qantas – www.qantas.com.au/info/flying/inTheAir/yourHealthInflight
- > Virgin blue – www.virginblue.com.au/Personal/Flightinfo/Inflighthealth

RECIPROCAL HEALTH AGREEMENTS

Australia has health care agreements with Finland, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

These agreements allow Australians to access urgent or emergency treatment overseas. However, general medical services are only provided when the need for treatment arises and it would be unreasonable to delay treatment until the individual's return to Australia.

It is important to remember that:

- health care agreements are no substitute for travel insurance. They will not cover you if a doctor recommends medical evacuation back to Australia
- you will only be covered by these health care agreements once you are in the specific country. Health problems which occur during travel to and from an agreement country are not covered
- if you wish to be treated under the relevant reciprocal health care agreement, you must advise the medical staff in the country you are visiting. You will need to provide the local authorities with:
 - > your Australian passport or other passport which shows you are a permanent Australian resident
 - > a valid Medicare card. If you do not have a valid Medicare card, or your card will expire while you are away, visit a Medicare office and arrange for a new card before travelling overseas.

Further information about health care when travelling overseas and international health agreements can be found at www.medicareaustralia.gov.au or by calling 132 011.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

If you receive a pension from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) it is your responsibility to advise DVA of your intention to travel overseas before you leave. Ask about the possible implications your overseas travel may have on your pension and health care entitlements. A DVA "Gold card" or DVA health care card does not guarantee that DVA will cover your medical costs while overseas. Further information is available at www.dva.gov.au or by calling DVA on 133 254.

GETTING HELP OVERSEAS

INSURANCE COMPANIES

Travel insurance companies often have in place a 24-hour assistance call centre that you can call from anywhere in the world. If you get sick overseas or are involved in a medical emergency, you should contact your travel insurance provider as soon as possible.

Ensure that you do not leave Australia without the correct procedures and contact numbers for contacting your insurer from overseas.

CONSULAR SERVICES

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides assistance to Australians who find themselves in trouble overseas. This support is referred to as consular services.

The Australian Government will do what it can to help Australians in difficulty overseas, however there are legal and practical limits to what can be done to assist travellers in other countries.

The *Consular Services Charter* sets out the standards of service all Australians can expect to receive from consular staff, including what they can and cannot do, and is available on smartraveller.gov.au.

A directory of Australian overseas missions appears in the 'Getting Help Overseas' section of each edition of *Travel Smart: hints for Australian travellers*. This booklet is issued with your passport and available online at smartraveller.gov.au. Canadian missions providing consular assistance to Australians are also listed in the *Travel Smart: hints for Australian travellers* publication.

The 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre (CEC) in Canberra can also be contacted for assistance from anywhere in the world on +61 2 6261 3305 or 1300 555 135 (local cost within Australia).

COUNSELLING SERVICES

Australians overseas in need of counselling services can contact our Consular Emergency Centre on **+61 2 6261 3305** to be transferred to a Lifeline Telephone Counsellor.



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- 1** Take out **travel insurance** to cover hospital treatment, medical evacuation and any activities in which you plan to participate.
- 2** Before travelling overseas **register** your travel and contact details online at ***smartraveller.gov.au*** or at the local Australian embassy, high commission or consulate once you arrive so we can contact you in an emergency.
- 3** Check the latest **travel advice** for your destination at ***smartraveller.gov.au*** before you go. **Subscribe** to receive free email notification each time the advice is updated.

While every care has been taken in preparing this brochure, neither the Australian Government nor its agents or employees, including any member of Australia's diplomatic and consular staff abroad, can accept liability for any injury, loss or damage arising in respect of any statement contained herein.

Consular Policy Branch
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
R.G. Casey Building
John McEwen Crescent
BARTON ACT 0221
Tel (02) 6261 3305; 1300 555 135

Information for travellers and travel advisories are available from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's smartraveller website: ***smartraveller.gov.au***.

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