
Travel and holiday planning

Summary

- Common travel hazards include jet lag, theft, illness and stress.
 - Have a medical check-up to make sure you are healthy before you travel and discuss vaccinations with your doctor.
 - Before you go, research the safety of your intended destination with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
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Taking a holiday can broaden your horizons and recharge your batteries. At the same time, travelling – particularly overseas – can be fraught with hazards for the unwary tourist. Common travel hazards include jet lag, theft, illness, stress, local politics and natural disasters. Simple planning can reduce your risk of ill health and harm.

Stay in contact

Avoid unnecessary worry for family and friends. Suggestions include:

- Give someone at home a copy of your proposed itinerary.
- Notify the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of your itinerary. You can also register your itinerary at any Australian embassy.
- Tell loved ones at home how you intend to keep in touch. For example, you may arrange to ring, text or email regularly. Then, if you fail to keep to this schedule, your loved ones at home can raise the alarm.

Cope with jet lag

Jet lag is fatigue caused by sudden travel across time zones. Suggestions on how to reduce the impact of jet lag include:

- Sleep on the plane. Avoid alcohol, which disrupts sleep rhythms.
- When you arrive at your destination, spend time outdoors. The sunlight will 'reset' your internal clock.
- A couple of caffeinated drinks can help to keep you awake during the first day.

Don't be an easy target

Tourists can make easy targets for thieves. This is often because they stand out in a crowd, are unused to their surroundings and are generally carrying money, credit cards and valuables like cameras. Safety suggestions include:

- Before you go, research the safety of your intended destination with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Try not to look like a tourist – for example, don't hang a camera around your neck.
- Carry the contact details of the local Australian embassy with you.
- Don't hitchhike. Avoid travelling at night.
- For up-to-date information on 'safe' and 'unsafe' areas of the city, consult your hotel manager or local tourist information officer.

Keep out of danger

Understand your destination and research its current travel status so you can make informed decisions.

Suggestions include:

- Avoid areas of civil unrest.
 - Observe local customs.
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- Remember that the laws of a foreign country also apply to tourists. Ignorance of the law is not a defence. Don't assume that the Australian government can get you out of jail.
- Transport safety standards differ widely from one country to the next. Don't assume, for example, that travelling by boat is safe because it is safe at home.

Stay healthy

One overseas traveller in two will have a travel-related illness. The illness may be mild, such as gastroenteritis, and may not require treatment or it may be more serious, such as malaria or dengue fever.

Suggestions include:

- Have a medical check-up to make sure you are healthy before you travel.
- Discuss vaccinations with your doctor.
- Organise travel insurance, including cover if you need to be evacuated to a suitable hospital.
- Pack an appropriate first aid kit. Take enough regular medication to last the entire trip because some drugs may not be available overseas.
- Some medications that are legal in Australia may be prohibited overseas. Check with the Australian embassy in the country you intend to visit. Take a signed note from your doctor explaining the purpose of your medications, just in case.
- HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible infections are widespread (endemic) throughout Asia and Africa. Always practise safe sex.
- Eat at large busy restaurants and hotels. Drink bottled water.
- If you are at risk of malaria, take every measure to protect against mosquitoes. For example, wear insect repellent and, where possible, stay in air-conditioned and screened accommodation. Take antimalarial drugs when advised.

Find out if emergency healthcare is available

Australia has a reciprocal healthcare agreement with some countries, which means emergency care is available for Australian tourists. Check with Medicare for an up-to-date list of participating countries. (You still need travel health insurance.)

Travel happily with your kids

Travelling with children can be challenging and exhausting for parents. Suggestions include:

- Ask your travel agent, airline and accommodation for child-friendly suggestions.
- Some hotels and resorts have childminding facilities – this is usually an extra expense, so check prices first.
- Include family events and child-oriented activities in your itinerary.
- Don't try to pack too much fun into a single day – children tire quickly.
- Take plenty of small and light toys.

Reduce holiday stress

Family holidays that are supposed to be relaxing can sometimes be stressful. Most families are not used to spending every waking minute together, usually because family members are at work or at school for much of the day.

Suggestions include:

- Consider accommodation with two or more bedrooms.
- Split the family into teams and explore attractions separately. Swap team members the next day.
- Make sure there is something for everybody in the travel itinerary.
- Don't try to do too much. A packed itinerary and sore feet day after day will increase everyone's stress level. Plan for lazy afternoons too.

Where to get help

- Your doctor

- Travel agent
- Airline
- Travel Clinics Australia Tel. 1300 369 359 (for appointments)
- Travel Clinics Infoline Tel. 1900 969 359 (higher call charges apply)
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Travel Advice Tel. 1300 139 281
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Medicare Tel. 132 011

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