



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

BACKPACKING OVERSEAS



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A must see destination.

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You've checked your passport is valid, booked your tickets and packed your bags. Ready to go? Not quite. Whether you are first time or seasoned traveller, there are a few more things you should do to make your trip as enjoyable and hassle-free as possible.

This brochure is designed to provide backpackers with 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 *Travelling well* 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 or visit websites like www.lonelyplanet.com.au, www.roughguides.com and www.travelbug.gov.au for practical tips.

Organise comprehensive **travel insurance** and make sure you **register** your details at **smartraveller.gov.au** before you leave, so you can be easily contacted in an emergency.

Not-for-profit organisations such as **Youth Hostel Association (YHA)** offer regular traveller information nights throughout Australia. For dates and locations, check the travel sections in newspapers or visit **www.yha.com.au**.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

If you cannot afford travel insurance,
you cannot afford to travel.

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. It will save you worry and a possible financial burden. Medical costs overseas can be in the tens of thousands of dollars and many people have been burdened financially in paying these costs.

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

Case Study

Brian, a university student, decided to take time off and travel around Europe. He thought running with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain, sounded fun. He fell when racing the bulls and was badly injured. He needed brain surgery and a long period of rehabilitation. Two months in the local hospital cost \$75,000. Brian came home by an air ambulance with a full medical team, which cost \$150,000. He did not have travel insurance and his family had no choice but to re-mortgage their house to meet the bills.

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.

Case Study

Katrina and Matt were holidaying on a resort island in Europe and hired a moped to visit a remote beach. They did not even think to ask about helmets - none of the locals wore them. A collision with a truck on a tight bend left Katrina in hospital with a broken leg and concussion. She had travel insurance but the company would not cover the costs because she was not wearing a helmet and Matt, who was driving the moped at the time of the accident, did not have an Australian motorcycle licence.

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 travelling partner under the one policy. Cover, however, varies from policy to policy. Be sure to confirm all details with your insurance provider and receive written confirmation of your policy.

The Australian Government will not pay for your medical treatment overseas or medical evacuation to Australia or a third country. Travellers without travel insurance are personally liable for covering any medical and associated costs they incur.

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 your 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.

Remember

- Australian missions overseas cannot help you arrange visas, work or residence permits for other countries.
- A visa does not guarantee entry to a foreign country.
- A tourist visa in most cases does not allow you to work in a foreign country.

RESEARCH AND PLAN AHEAD

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

- **Working holidays** – if you are planning to work overseas, early preparation is essential. You should find out what rules and regulations apply before you depart by contacting the foreign mission of the country where you hope to work.

Australia has reciprocal arrangements with a number of countries which allow Australians to work while on holiday there. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship website at www.immi.gov.au provides information on countries/regions participating in the Working Holiday Program with Australia.

The not-for-profit organisation **International Exchange Programs (IEP)** specialises in international exchange programs for young Australians who want to work overseas. Further information can be found on the IEP website www.iep.org.au.

- **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, make sure it is legal in the countries you are visiting by contacting the relevant foreign mission in Australia. Contact details are available 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 medication in the original, labelled container to avoid customs problems.

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

- **Accommodation** – if you are travelling 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.

Accommodation booking websites often offer discounted web-only specials. Make sure you read and familiarise yourself with the terms and conditions before you book.

- **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.

- **Transport** – When organising how to 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**”.

Make sure you organise an International Drivers Licence before you leave Australia if you are planning to drive overseas.

Learn about road conditions and traffic culture of the places you plan to visit. If you are renting a car make sure it is roadworthy.

If you are planning on travelling on motorbikes, scooters or mopeds overseas, make sure your travel insurance policy covers this activity. Ask if a motorbike licence issued overseas is acceptable. Do not let local rental agencies convince you that you do not need a helmet. In many countries riding a motorbike without a helmet is not only incredibly dangerous, it is also illegal.

STAYING SAFE

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

REGISTER BEFORE YOUR TRAVEL

Registering your personal and travel details on smartraveller.gov.au before your 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.

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.

- 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 *Travelling dual nationals* booklet available from smartraveller.gov.au.

WOMEN TRAVELLING ALONE

Most women experience trouble-free travel, however, women face greater risks when travelling alone. Women should be aware that they may become the focus of unwanted attention if they appear to be unaccompanied. The *Travelling women* booklet, available from smartraveller.gov.au, provides hints on how to avoid difficult situations and minimise risks.

DRUGS

Do not use, carry or get involved with drugs.

Every year Australians are arrested overseas on drug charges. Do not be fooled into thinking carrying or taking drugs overseas is worth the risk. Australians do get caught and some countries impose tough penalties including life imprisonment and the death penalty. Even the possession of small quantities of so-called 'soft drugs' can attract jail sentences or heavy fines.

Avoid getting into trouble with drugs overseas by:

- obeying the law – do not purchase, take or travel with drugs
- locking your bags as a precaution against tampering or theft
- not leaving your bags unattended in public areas or in the care of a stranger
- never carrying anything into or out of another country for someone else
- ensuring your medication is not considered illegal overseas by contacting the nearest foreign mission of the country you are visiting before your departure. Contact details are available from www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html.

In some countries the presence of illegal drugs detected in blood or urine tests is considered possession. You may also be charged with possessing drugs if trace amounts are found on your body, bloodstream, clothes or luggage. Amounts of 0.05 grams or less can lead to a conviction for drug possession and lengthy minimum mandatory prison sentences.

If arrested you have the right to contact the Australian Government, but consular assistance cannot override local law, even when local laws may appear harsh by Australian standards. The Australian Government cannot get you out of jail.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

While travelling, regularly contact your family and friends. It is important to let them know of any changes to your travel plans. You may be having a great time on your holiday but forgetting to contact family and friends can cause them needless stress and anxiety. Each year, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) receives hundreds of calls from worried families who have not heard from loved ones overseas and are concerned for their safety.

Providing regular and detailed travel information to your family and friends will assist them to provide accurate information to DFAT if there is a serious concern for your welfare while overseas.

STAYING HEALTHY

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

If you wear glasses take along a spare pair 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 medication 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.

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. If you buy needles and syringes overseas ensure they are sealed and sterile.

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 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 can be contacted by phone worldwide +61 8 8274 0361 or www.medicalert.com.au.

USEFUL LINKS

World Health Organization – www.who.int

Immunise Australia Program – www.immunise.health.gov.au

Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad – www.masta.edu.au

Travel Clinics Australia – www.travelclinic.com.au

The Travel Doctor (TMVC) – www.traveldoctor.com.au

ADDITIONAL HINTS

- Be aware of the risk of HIV - avoid ear-piercing, acupuncture, tattooing, hair-cut or dental work while travelling in countries with lower health or hygiene standards.
- Practice safe sex. Never assume that your partner is free of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Carry a reliable brand of condom as they may not be available at your destination.
- Avoid temporary 'black henna' tattoos as they often contain a dye which can cause serious skin reactions. For further information see the Australasian College of Dermatologists' website at www.dermcoll.asn.au.
- Medical tourism, including cosmetic surgery and sex-change operations, is common in Asia. Be aware that while the range of medical and dental services available may be impressive at first sight, standards can be lacking resulting in serious and possibly life-threatening complications.

RECIPROCAL HEALTH AGREEMENTS

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

These agreements enable Australians to access urgent or emergency treatment overseas. However medical services are only provided when 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.

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**.

GETTING HELP OVERSEAS

Travel insurance companies often have 24-hour assistance call centres 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.

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.

The *Consular Service Charter* sets out the standard of services 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 publication 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 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.

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

December 2009