



**Australian Government**

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

# DEATH OVERSEAS



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Each year almost 1000 Australians die overseas, usually through illness or accident. The death of a loved one is always distressing for family and friends. When the death occurs overseas, isolating and confusing circumstances can make it even more difficult.

The death of an Australian overseas can involve complications in organising the funeral, repatriation and other administrative arrangements and formalities. These processes can seem unfamiliar and unnecessarily demanding for the family or friends, whose priority is to bring their loved one home.

This brochure is designed to provide information to help you understand what consular staff in Australia and overseas can do to assist during this difficult time. It also provides guidance on what should be done when a relative or a travelling companion dies overseas.

When Australians travel abroad, they leave behind Australia's support systems, emergency service capabilities and medical facilities. The Australian Government will do what it can to help families and friends who have lost a loved one overseas. However, there are legal and practical limits to what can be done on their behalf. You should have realistic expectations about this.

## INSURANCE

If an Australian dies overseas and has travel insurance, this can significantly reduce the stress on relatives and loved ones. Insurance companies will generally provide advice on and take care of most of the arrangements and costs associated with a local funeral or the return of the remains to Australia.

Unfortunately, many Australians are still travelling overseas without adequate insurance cover. If an Australian dies overseas and is not covered by travel insurance, it becomes their family's responsibility to make the funeral arrangements and meet the costs involved, such as returning the remains to Australia.

We strongly recommend that all Australians travelling overseas take out travel insurance to cover the costs of hospitalisation and medical treatment should they become ill overseas, as well as costs incurred as a result of death.

## WHAT WE CAN DO

We will do everything in our power to assist Australians who have lost a relative or friend overseas. We can often help with our knowledge and understanding of the local environment, but we must also work within the legal and administrative processes that apply in the host country.

We can:

- assist family and friends to understand the legal and administrative processes that apply in that country
- if required, liaise with representatives from the travel insurance company in both the overseas country and Australia
- provide a list of local funeral directors and lawyers
- liaise with the local funeral director so they are aware of Australian quarantine regulations
- provide guidance on obtaining translations if an English-speaking funeral service company is not available
- advise on the estimated cost of local burial, local cremation and transport of the remains back to Australia
- advise on the estimated cost of transporting any personal property back to Australia
- advise on how to transfer funds from Australia to meet any costs
- assist, if necessary, to identify the body
- assist with obtaining quarantine clearance for the return of the remains
- provide advice on managing media enquiries.

## WHAT WE CANNOT DO

We cannot:

- recommend a funeral director or lawyer
- investigate the death of an Australian citizen
- pay burial or cremation expenses
- pay for or organise the return of the remains to Australia
- take responsibility for freighting personal effects
- make legal representations or become involved in legal issues surrounding the circumstances of the death or matters relating to a deceased estate
- pay any outstanding debts the deceased may have.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF A FAMILY MEMBER DIES OVERSEAS?

Under international law, the nearest Australian mission (embassy, consulate or high commission) should always be notified of the death of an Australian citizen.

If a tour company or a friend notifies us of the death of an Australian overseas, we will always confirm the information with the local authorities in that country. We will then contact the State or Federal police who will visit the next-of-kin (or other contact specified in the deceased's passport application) to inform them of the death and provide our contact details to them. We can then provide the next-of-kin with further details about the death and advise the steps that need to be taken overseas.

It is important to understand that it is the responsibility of the funeral directors appointed overseas and in Australia to make repatriation and funeral arrangements on behalf of the next-of-kin and in accordance with their wishes.

While consular staff will make every effort to ensure that relatives do not first learn of a death via the media, this cannot always be prevented. If you hear of the death from a journalist, a tour operator or any other third party, you should contact the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre on +61 2 6261 3305 (anywhere in the world) or 1300 555 135 (local call cost within Australia). We will seek to confirm the death with local authorities and provide advice to immediate family on how to best manage media enquiries.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY TRAVELLING COMPANION DIES?

It is important that the death of any Australian overseas is reported to an Australian mission. 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](http://smartraveller.gov.au).

You will need the following details about the deceased if you report the death:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Passport number, place and date of issue
- Next-of-kin
- Whether they were suffering from any communicable illness
- Whether they had travel insurance and if so, the name and contact details of the company.

If the death is unexpected and did not occur in a hospital, the local police will be involved. If you have not yet reported the death, the police should immediately notify the nearest Australian mission. The insurance company or consular staff in Australia can help to notify the next-of-kin in Australia.

## DOES THE NEXT-OF-KIN HAVE TO TRAVEL TO THE COUNTRY?

This is not necessary unless they wish to. The Australian mission in the country can assist by providing the next-of-kin with a list of local funeral directors, who will make the necessary funeral and repatriation arrangements on their behalf and in accordance with their wishes.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO THE REMAINS?

The next-of-kin will be consulted and the Australian mission and local funeral directors will make every effort to meet the deceased's or their relatives' wishes. However, in some countries and in certain circumstances, local regulations and conditions may require a quick decision on what to do with the remains.

## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR THE REMAINS TO BE RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA?

This depends on local regulations and circumstances. In some cases, it can take up to two weeks. It may take longer if, for example, there is a need for an autopsy/coronial enquiry to determine the cause of death.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE DEATH OCCURS WHERE THERE IS NO AUSTRALIAN DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION?

Not all countries have an Australian diplomatic or consular post but there is usually an Australian post in the region. Under a consular agreement between Australia and Canada there are a number of locations where Australians have access to consular services through embassies and high commissions managed by the Canadian Government. Informal arrangements also exist with other consular services, including those of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, to lend assistance to Australians in need.

Address and telephone numbers of Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates can be found at [www.dfat.gov.au/missions](http://www.dfat.gov.au/missions).

## GETTING HELP OVERSEAS

### CONSULAR SERVICES

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provides assistance to Australians who find themselves in trouble overseas. This support is referred to as consular services. These services are provided through our headquarters in Canberra and through Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates.

The Australian Government will do what it can to help all 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](http://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](http://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 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 who need counselling services can contact our Consular Emergency Centre on **+61 2 6261 3305** to be transferred to a Lifeline Telephone Counsellor.



## Australian Government

### Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

- 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](http://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](http://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](http://smartraveller.gov.au)**.

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