



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

WHEN SOMEONE IS MISSING OVERSEAS



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A must see destination.

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Australians are travelling overseas in ever-increasing numbers. Each year, on average, 14,000 inquiries are made about Australians overseas who cannot be contacted by their family and/or friends.

Unexpectedly losing contact with a family member or friend who is travelling overseas can be very distressing. This brochure is designed to provide information about the process to follow if you are concerned about the welfare of a family member or friend overseas or need to get in contact with them urgently.

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 to contact their loved ones. However, we can only provide this assistance **where there is a well-founded concern**. There are also legal and practical limits to what can be done and you should have realistic expectations about this.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance can significantly reduce the stress on relatives and friends if someone is missing overseas and has been injured, becomes ill, has been hospitalised or has died. Insurance companies will generally provide advice on and take care of most of the arrangements and costs associated with the hospitalisation, medical evacuation or return of remains to Australia.

Unfortunately, many Australians are still travelling overseas **without** adequate insurance cover. We strongly recommend that all Australians travelling overseas take out comprehensive 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 CAN YOU DO?

If you become concerned about a person's welfare overseas **there are some initial steps you can take:**

- Attempt to regularly phone, text, email or mail the person and their travelling companions.
- Establish contact with family, friends and travelling companions to ascertain if others may have heard from or had contact with the person.
- Find out from the families of the travelling companions if they have heard from their loved ones.
- Contact their financial institution/s to check (if authorised) details of their latest credit/debit card transactions.
- Contact their last known address or employer seeking information about their possible movements.
- Contact their travel agent or airline to seek (if authorised) details of their travel arrangements.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU BEGIN TRYING TO LOCATE A PERSON OVERSEAS:

- Remain calm. Most Australians are found safe and well.
- Gather as much information as possible from your enquiries.
- Maintain a record of all the information you gather so you can provide comprehensive details, if required, to others assisting to locate the person.

WHO CAN HELP YOU?

If after making initial enquiries you are still unable to locate your loved one or friend **and have serious concerns for their safety or welfare**, contact your local police station.

- You can submit a missing person's report at your local state or territory police station. Depending on the information you provide, your local police will determine if it is necessary to lodge a missing person's report with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra.
- For the police to prepare a report you will need to provide the following in relation to the missing person:
 - > Full name
 - > Place and date of birth
 - > Passport number (if known)
 - > Details of any other citizenship or passports held (if known)
 - > Photographs, preferably recent
 - > Known travel details and plans, including itineraries
 - > Contact details overseas (including the names and contact details of employers and people they have been travelling with)
 - > Advice about the last contact they made.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

We will only pursue enquiries that are based on a serious concern for the welfare of an Australian overseas and a belief that the person concerned needs consular assistance. If we assess that the missing person overseas needs consular assistance we will:

- conduct enquiries using Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates to try to locate the whereabouts of the missing person
- if necessary, request the involvement of INTERPOL to initiate an investigation overseas. (INTERPOL is the world's largest international police organisation, with 186 member countries, and facilitates cross-border police co-operation)
- contact and provide information to you on any developments
- respond to and liaise with media concerning the missing person's case.

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.

Privacy provisions operating in foreign countries can severely restrict the information provided to consular staff overseas by local law enforcement agencies.

If your missing loved one contacts you, please inform DFAT or the local police immediately.

PRIVACY OF CONSULAR CLIENTS

Any person who receives assistance from Australian consular officials overseas has the right to privacy as an Australian citizen protected by the *Privacy Act 1988*.

Unless consular officials receive the person's consent, they are unable to disclose personal information about them, even to their next-of-kin, unless this is required by the police, Australian law or a judgment is made that the life or health of the person or another person is being threatened. Family members should be aware that, if a missing person is located by a consular official but decides he or she does not want anyone notified, the consular official cannot pass on personal information.

WHO ELSE CAN HELP YOU?

Depending on the circumstances, there are several other organisations that may be able to assist:

- **National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC)**

The NMPCC is located with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in Canberra. The centre works with state and territory police services and government and non-government organisations to provide a coordinated approach to locating missing people in Australia and overseas. The centre's role is to facilitate the dissemination and distribution of information to the public via the NMPCC website. Only cases of missing persons that have a signed authority from the next of kin for the use of images and information are provided by state and territory police to the NMPCC. Further information is available from the NMPCC at www.afp.gov.au/national/missing or by calling **1800 000 634** (toll free).

- **Australian Red Cross**

The International Red Cross / Red Crescent global tracing network reaches out to more than 185 countries to re-establish contact between relatives separated as a result of war, internal conflict or natural disaster. It is a service provided free of charge to the public. You can contact the Australian Red Cross Tracing Service on 03 9345 1800. Further information and contact details are available at www.redcross.org.au

- **The Salvation Army**

If you have lost contact with a family member, the Salvation Army Family Tracing Service may be able to help you locate them through their networks in more than 100 countries. A donation is usually accepted for this work. Further information and contact details are available at www.salvos.org.au

– **International Social Service (ISS)**

ISS traces immediate family members in conjunction with its social work across 150 countries. It requests a contribution towards costs for this work. Further information and contact details are available at ***www.iss.org.au***.

GETTING HELP 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. 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**.

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 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 at **smartraveller.gov.au**.

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