



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

TRAVELLING SENIORS



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A must see destination.

CONTENTS

BEFORE YOU GO – BE PREPARED	4
TRAVEL INSURANCE	5
PASSPORTS AND VISAS	7
RESEARCH AND PLAN AHEAD	8
STAYING SAFE	10
REGISTER BEFORE YOU TRAVEL	10
RESEARCH YOUR DESTINATION	10
MONEY AND VALUABLES	11
LOCAL CUSTOMS AND LAWS	12
DUAL NATIONALITY	13
STAYING HEALTHY	14
USEFUL LINKS	15
RECIPROCAL HEALTH AGREEMENTS	17
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS	17
GETTING HELP OVERSEAS	18
CONSULAR SERVICES	18
COUNSELLING SERVICES	19

Australians – including senior Australians – are increasingly travelling overseas. Whether you are an experienced international traveller or a first timer, you could find a simple oversight in your preparations turning an enjoyable journey into an unpleasant experience.

This brochure is designed to provide senior travellers with information to help prepare for a hassle-free and safe 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 guide books, 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

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.

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.

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.

Case Study

Erin was excited about her cruise at the start of her 'round the world adventure. As part of her pre-departure preparations, she hastily organised basic travel insurance. While at sea, and after suffering from a severe shortage of breath, Erin was diagnosed as having pulmonary emphysema, requiring oxygen until the next port. On arrival, Erin was taken to the nearest local hospital and later required a medivac to a better-equipped hospital. Erin's basic travel insurance did not cover pre-existing medical conditions. She paid \$10,000 for the medivac and her hospitalisation. This unexpected expense prevented Erin from completing her 'round the world adventure.

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. 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 also 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 your 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, make sure it is legal in the countries you are visiting by contacting the relevant foreign mission in Australia before leaving home. 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 letter from your doctor explaining what the medication is and stating it is for your own use.

- **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.
- **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.

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

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

STAYING SAFE

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

REGISTER BEFORE YOU 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 can 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.

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.
- Pack your senior citizens card. It might not work overseas, but it is worth taking with you, just in case.

LOCAL CUSTOMS AND LAWS

Familiarise yourself with and show sensitivity to local customs.

In some cultures people are deeply offended by revealing or inappropriate clothes. 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.

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 people whose parents or 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 brochure *Travelling dual nationals* available from **smartraveller.gov.au**.

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 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 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.

USEFUL LINKS

World Health Organization – **www.who.int**

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

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 on +61 8 8274 0361 or visiting **www.medicalert.com.au**.

If you need to buy medication locally, be careful not to buy imitation or counterfeit medication or 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.

Case Study

Josef and Louise prepared well for their trip to Europe. They took out comprehensive travel insurance, left copies of their documents and their itinerary with their family and took separate copies of their passport details with them. They carried an appropriate supply of PBS prescribed medication for their current complaints in their luggage. When leaving the plane, a crew member told them their luggage had been delayed in transit. Josef became worried about missing his medication and his heart started to race. On arrival at the hotel, Louise noticed the hotel pharmacy was displaying medication with the same label as the medicine Josef was prescribed for his heart condition. As Josef's health was not improving, Louise purchased the medication without checking its strength, which was half that of Josef's usual dose. Josef had a heart attack in the evening and was hospitalised.

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**.

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

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.

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 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.

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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**.

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