



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

# BACKPACKING OVERSEAS



[smartraveller.gov.au](https://smartraveller.gov.au)

Every traveller, every trip.

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You've checked your passport is valid and booked your tickets. Ready to go? Not quite. Whether you're a 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 help you prepare for a safe and healthy journey. It should be read in conjunction with *Travel smart: hints for Australian travellers* and *Travelling well*, available at **smartraveller.gov.au**.

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 at **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.

### Read the travel advice

Start with the latest travel advice for your destination at **smartraveller.gov.au**. This advice will give you information on the main risks you may face and some precautions you can take while travelling overseas. Our travel advice also includes practical information on the safety and security situation, local laws and health issues.

### Register before you travel

Make sure you register your travel and contact details online at **smartraveller.gov.au** before you travel. This will make it easier to contact you in an emergency, whether it's a natural disaster, civil disturbance or family issue. The registration information you provide is protected by Australia's strict privacy laws.

### Subscribe to travel advice

While at **smartraveller.gov.au**, subscribe to receive free email updates to travel advice. This will help you stay across any changes to the safety and security situation, local laws and health issues in the countries you plan to visit.

### Travel insurance

If you can't afford travel insurance, you can't afford to travel.

Don't base your decision about taking out travel insurance on the assumption that 'it will not happen to me'. Accidents do happen and comprehensive travel insurance could save you and your family thousands of dollars.

You should make sure your comprehensive travel insurance 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 when things go wrong.

If you plan to rely on the travel insurance provided by your credit card, before travelling you should obtain written confirmation that you're covered and ensure that you have the details of the policy clearly outlined in writing.

You may be able to obtain travel insurance for yourself and your travelling partner under the one policy. However, cover varies from policy to policy so check the fine print. Make sure you confirm all details with your insurance provider and receive written confirmation of your policy.

## **Smartraveller tips**

- Always read the product disclosure statement carefully and ensure that you understand exactly what your travel insurance covers.
- Make sure you understand the terms and conditions of your insurance policy and any legal requirements.
- Compare insurance policies and make sure the policy you choose suits your needs, covers the activities you plan to do and is valid for the whole time you'll be away.

The Australian Government won't 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.

For more information on travel insurance, including tips for choosing a policy that's right for you, visit **[smartraveller.gov.au](https://smartraveller.gov.au)**.

## 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.

## Smartraveller tip

- ✓ No one plans for things to go wrong when they are overseas. Take out comprehensive travel insurance—it could save you and your family thousands.

## Case study

Katrina and Matt were holidaying on a resort island in Europe and hired a moped to visit a remote beach. They didn't 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. Matt, who was driving the moped at the time of the accident, did not have an Australian motorcycle licence which meant his insurance wouldn't cover him either.

## Smartraveller tip

- ✓ Make sure you understand the terms and conditions of your insurance policy and any legal requirements.

## 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.

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 you're away.

Find out early what visas you need by contacting the foreign mission (embassy, high commission or consulate) of the countries you intend to visit. Some countries have specific entry and exit requirements, including compulsory vaccinations. Be aware that a tourist visa may not allow you to undertake any form of work—including voluntary or unpaid activities. Remember to also check the visa requirements of countries you might be transiting. Contact details for foreign missions in Australia can be found in *White Pages* or online at [www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html).

More information on Australian passports can be found at [www.passports.gov.au](http://www.passports.gov.au) or by calling the Australian Passport Information Service on **13 12 32** in Australia.

## Remember

- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Australia and Australian missions overseas cannot help you arrange visas or work and residency permits for other countries.
- A visa does not guarantee entry to a foreign country.
- In most cases a tourist visa does not allow you to work in a foreign country, including voluntary or unpaid activities.

## 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 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're 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, read the Dual nationals publication available at **smartraveller.gov.au**.

## Planning your trip

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

### Research your destination

Find out about the political, cultural and economic environment of your destination so you'll 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. Talk with family or friends who are familiar with the countries you'll be visiting. You could also consult DFAT's country briefs available at **www.dfat.gov.au** to learn more about your destinations.

### Working holidays

If you're 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. Working holiday visas need to be arranged before you leave Australia.

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](http://www.immi.gov.au) provides information on countries and regions participating in the Working Holiday Program with Australia.

## Airlines

If you're concerned the airline may question your fitness to fly, we recommend you obtain a letter from your doctor confirming that you're 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 with you, 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.

## Accommodation

If you're travelling independently, it's recommended that you book your accommodation prior to arrival, especially if you're 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 Civil Aviation Safety Authority at [www.casa.gov.au](http://www.casa.gov.au) and the Australian Government's travel security website, [www.travelsecure.infrastructure.gov.au](http://www.travelsecure.infrastructure.gov.au).



If you're travelling to the USA, make sure you familiarise yourself with their specific airline baggage lock requirements. Information is available from the US Department of Homeland Security at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov).

## Staying safe overseas

You can take practical steps to stay safe overseas and avoid running into difficulties and dangerous situations.

### Local transport and tours

When organising how to get around overseas, check out the local travel section in our travel advisories at [smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au) and read our travel bulletin on 'Overseas Road Safety'.

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.

Make sure you organise an International Driving Permit before you leave Australia if you're planning to drive overseas.

Learn about road conditions and traffic culture of the places you plan to visit. If you're renting a car, make sure it's roadworthy.

If you're planning to travel on motorbikes, scooters or mopeds overseas, make sure your travel insurance policy covers this activity. Check if you're required to have a valid motorcycle licence in Australia and if this is acceptable under local requirements. Don't let local rental agencies convince you that you don't need a helmet. In many countries riding a motorbike without a helmet is not only incredibly dangerous, it's also illegal.

### Money and valuables

You can take a number of steps to protect yourself against loss and theft of money and valuables.

- Organise a variety of ways of accessing your money overseas, such as debit cards, credit cards, traveller's 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 let your credit card out of your 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 the other copy with someone at home.

## Local laws and customs

Familiarise yourself with local laws and show sensitivity to local customs.

Read the travel advice for your destination at **smartraveller.gov.au** for practical information on local laws and customs. In some cultures conservative standards of dress and behaviour can apply; for example, people may be offended by revealing or inappropriate clothes. Public displays of affection may also be considered offensive. You should talk to other travellers and consult guidebooks or search the internet for more information on local customs and laws.

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.

## Women travellers

Women travelling alone – take particular care.

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* publication, available at [smartraveller.gov.au](http://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. Don't be fooled into thinking that 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 following these simple precautions:

- Obey the law – do not purchase, take or travel with drugs.
- Lock your bags as a precaution against tampering or theft.
- Don't leave your bags unattended in public areas or in the care of a stranger.
- Never carry anything into or out of another country for someone else.
- Ensure any prescription medication is carried in its original packaging, accompanied by a letter from your doctor indicating what the medication is and that it's for personal use.
- Ensure your medication is not considered illegal overseas by contacting the nearest foreign mission of the country you're visiting before your departure. Contact details are available at [www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html](http://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 even 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.

### Alcohol

While 18 is the minimum drinking age in Australia, this limit is higher in some countries. Check the limit before you leave to avoid breaking the local law.

### Keep in touch

While travelling, make sure you regularly contact your family and friends. It's important to let them know of any changes to your travel plans and that you're well. 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 DFAT receives thousands of calls from worried families who haven't heard from loved ones overseas and are concerned for their safety.

Keeping in touch with your family and friends will assist them to provide accurate information to DFAT if there is a serious concern for your welfare while overseas and you need our help.

## Staying healthy overseas

Think about your health needs before you travel.

### Health checks and vaccinations

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 for your destination.

## Medication

If you're taking medicines overseas, we recommend that you:

- discuss with your doctor the medication you'll need to take
- carry a letter from your doctor detailing what the medication is, how much you'll be taking with you, and stating that it's for your own personal use
- leave the medication in its original packaging so it's clearly labelled with your name and dosage instructions.

If you're travelling with medication, make sure it's legal in the countries you're visiting by contacting the relevant foreign mission in Australia.

Contact details are available at [www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html).

If you need to travel with large quantities of medication, it's 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.

If you have to inject your medication, it may be preferable to carry your own needles and syringes if it's allowed in the countries you're visiting. If you buy needles and syringes overseas, ensure they are sealed and sterile.

Take enough medication to cover the length of your trip. If you need to purchase medication at your destination, be careful not to buy imitation or counterfeit medications and prescription drugs, and always check the strength of a medication with a doctor. Be aware that packaging and labelling may be similar to those available in Australia, but the strength and active ingredients can vary from country to country.

It's an offence to carry or send Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medication overseas unless it's for your own personal use, or for the use of someone travelling with you. You could be fined \$5,000 and spend two years in prison if you break the law. Additional information is

available at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) or by calling the PBS information line on **1800 020 613**.

More information on travelling with medication is available at [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au) or by calling the Overseas Drug Diversion information line on **1800 500 147**.

### Prescription glasses

If you wear glasses, take along a spare pair and/or a copy of the prescription so that they can be replaced more easily if lost or broken.

### Additional health tips

- Be aware of the risk of hepatitis and HIV – avoid ear-piercing, acupuncture, tattooing, haircuts 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 transmissible infections. 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](http://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 low, resulting in serious and possibly life-threatening complications.

### Reciprocal health agreements

Australia has reciprocal healthcare agreements with Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden 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 person returns to Australia. It's important to remember that healthcare agreements are no substitute for travel insurance. They won't cover you if a doctor recommends medical evacuation back to Australia.

### Useful links

To find out more about health and vaccination issues you can visit:

- World Health Organization – [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- Australian Immunisation Handbook – [www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au)

Further information about health care when travelling overseas and international health agreements is available at the Medicare Australia website, [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au), or by calling **13 20 11**.

## Getting help overseas

The Australian Government will do what it can to help Australians in difficulty overseas, but there are limits to what can be done.

### Consular services

DFAT provides assistance to Australians who find themselves in trouble overseas. This support is referred to as consular services; however, there are legal and practical limits to what can be done.

The *Consular Services 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 at [smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au).

### Kidnapping and hostage-taking

There is an ongoing high threat of kidnapping in a number of locations globally, including areas in Africa, Asia, Central and South America. You

should carefully read the travel advice for the countries you intend to visit. Due to the extremely dangerous security situation and access limitations in some locations, the Australian Government's ability to provide consular assistance to Australian citizens may be severely limited.

The Australian Government's longstanding policy is that it does not make payments or concessions to kidnappers. The Australian Government considers paying ransoms increases the risk of further kidnappings.

### Contact details

Contact details for Australian missions overseas are available at **[www.dfat.gov.au/missions](http://www.dfat.gov.au/missions)**. A directory of Australian missions also appears in the 'Getting Help Overseas' section of *Travel smart: hints for Australian travellers*. This publication is issued with your passport and is also available online at **[smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au)**.

Australia has an agreement with Canada to provide consular assistance to Australians in some countries. 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 in Canberra can also be contacted for assistance from anywhere in the world on **+61 2 6261 3305** or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia).

### Contact your travel insurance provider

Travel insurance companies often have 24-hour assistance centres that you can contact 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. Make sure you take your travel insurance policy information and contact numbers with you so you can easily contact your insurer from overseas. Consider leaving details of your travel insurance policy with family or friends back home.

For more information on insurance, read the 'Travel Insurance' section of this brochure.



## Counselling services

Australians in need of counselling services overseas can contact our Consular Emergency Centre on **+61 2 6261 3305** to be transferred to a Lifeline telephone counsellor.

## Other Smartraveller publications

DFAT publishes a range of brochures with travel hints for specific travel groups, and information about how to cope with unexpected events, available at **smartraveller.gov.au**.

Titles include:

- Travel smart: hints for Australian travellers
- Consular Services Charter
- Arrested or jailed overseas
- Death overseas
- Dual nationals
- Living and working overseas
- Sexual assault overseas
- Travelling with children
- Travelling seniors
- Travelling well
- Travelling women
- When someone is missing overseas

Copies of these brochures are also available at DFAT state and territory offices, Australian Passport Offices, and Australian missions overseas. You can also order copies online at **smartraveller.gov.au**.

The brochures *Travelling well*, *Travelling seniors* and *Dual nationals* are also available online in a number of community languages at **smartraveller.gov.au**.

## Top 10 travel tips

1. Check the latest travel advice at **smartraveller.gov.au** and subscribe to receive free email notifications each time the advice for your destination is updated.
2. Take out comprehensive travel insurance and ensure it covers you for the places you plan to visit and the things you plan to do.
3. 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 case of an emergency.
4. Obey the laws of the country you're visiting even if these appear harsh or unfair by Australian standards. Don't expect to be treated differently from the locals just because you're Australian.
5. Make sure you have the right visas for the countries you're visiting or transiting and check any other entry or exit requirements.
6. Make copies of your passport details, insurance policy, traveller's cheques, visas and credit card numbers. Carry one copy in a separate place to the original and leave a copy with someone at home.
7. Check with health professionals for information on recommended vaccinations and other health precautions. Remember that vaccinations can be an entry requirement to some countries. Also find out about taking medication overseas—certain medicines aren't allowed in some countries.

- 8.** Make sure your passport has at least six months' validity from your planned date of return to Australia. Carry extra passport photos in case your passport is lost or stolen and you need to replace it while you're away.
- 9.** Keep in contact with friends and family back home and give them a copy of your itinerary so they know where you are.
- 10.** Check to see if you're regarded as a national of the country you plan to visit, and whether dual nationality will have any implications for your travel plans.

# smartraveller.gov.au

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1. **Register** your travel and contact details online at [smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au) before you travel overseas—or at the local Australian embassy, high commission or consulate once you arrive—so we can contact you in an emergency.
2. 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.
3. Take out comprehensive **travel insurance** to cover hospital treatment, medical evacuation and any activities you plan to undertake in the countries you intend to visit.

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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