



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DEATH OVERSEAS



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Every traveller, every trip.

Each year around 1,000 Australians die overseas, usually through illness or accident. The death of a loved one is always distressing for family and friends and when the death occurs overseas, this can make the circumstances 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 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.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance that covers costs incurred as a result of death can significantly reduce the stress on 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 travel 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 provide consular services through our headquarters in Canberra and through Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates. We'll 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 foreign 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
- provide translation or interpreter services
- 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.

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 at smartraveller.gov.au.

Death of a family member

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'll always confirm the information with the local authorities in that country. We'll then contact the police in the relevant Australian state or territory, who will visit the family (or other contact nominated in the deceased's passport application) to inform them of the death and provide our contact details to them. We can then provide the family or nominated contact with further details about the death and advise the steps that need to be taken overseas.

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

While consular staff will make every effort to ensure that relatives don't 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** (from anywhere in the world) or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia). We'll seek to confirm the death with local authorities and provide advice to immediate family or next of kin on how best to manage media enquiries.

Does the family or next of kin have to travel to the country?

It's not necessary for family or next of kin to travel to the overseas country unless they wish to. The Australian mission in the country can assist by providing the family or other next of kin with a list of local funeral directors, who will liaise with funeral directors on behalf of the family regarding funeral and repatriation arrangements on their behalf and in accordance with their wishes.

Do I need to register the death in Australia?

Although it is not compulsory, you may wish to register the death in Australia with the Office of Regulatory Services. Information on how to do this is available from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in the state where the person resided.

Further information may also be available from the Registrar of Deaths Abroad, GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601. Tel: **02 6207 0460**, Fax **02 6207 0895**, website ors.act.gov.au

Death of a travelling companion

What should I do if my travelling companion dies?

It's important that the death of any Australian overseas is reported to an Australian mission. Contact details for Australian missions are available at dfat.gov.au/missions.

Ideally, you'll need the following details about the deceased if you report the death:

- full name
- date of birth
- passport number, place and date of issue
- immediate family member or close friend
- 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 didn't occur in a hospital, the local police will be involved. If you haven't yet reported the death, the police should immediately notify the nearest Australian mission. The relevant state or territory police in Australia can help to notify the family or other contacts in Australia.

Dealing with the remains

What happens to the remains?

The family or next of kin will be consulted on how to deal with the remains of the deceased, and the Australian mission and local funeral directors will make every effort to meet the wishes of the deceased or their next of kin. However, in some countries and in certain circumstances, local regulations and conditions may require a quick decision on what to do with the remains. In some cases, local regulations may require an autopsy before a death certificate or other documentation can be issued.

How long will it take for the remains to be returned to Australia?

The time required to return the remains to Australia depends on local regulations and circumstances. In some cases, it can take several weeks. It may take longer if, for example, there is a need for an autopsy or coronial enquiry to determine the cause of death.

Getting help overseas

Consular services

Contact details for Australian missions overseas are available at dfat.gov.au/missions.

Australia has an agreement with Canada to provide consular assistance to Australians in some countries. Contact details for Canadian missions providing consular assistance to Australians are also at dfat.gov.au/missions.

The 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra can be contacted for assistance from anywhere in the world on **+61 2 6261 3305** or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia).

Contact the travel insurance provider

Travel insurance companies often have 24-hour assistance centres that you can contact from anywhere in the world. If your family member or travelling companion dies overseas, you should also contact their travel insurance provider as soon as possible. Consider leaving travel insurance policy details with family or friends back home in the case they need to access this information quickly.

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.

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Every traveller, every trip.

- 1. Register** your travel and contact details online at *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* 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*.

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