



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

TRAVELLING WELL



smartraveller.gov.au

Every traveller, every trip.

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Australians are travelling overseas in ever-increasing numbers. Whatever your age or destination, properly preparing before you leave and staying in good health while travelling can help you to have a happy and enjoyable trip.

This brochure is designed to provide travel tips and health information to help you prepare for a safe and healthy journey. It should be read in conjunction with *Travel smart: hints for Australian travellers* and, if applicable, the *Travelling seniors*, *Travelling with children*, *Travelling women* or *Backpacking overseas* 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 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.

Overseas medical costs are not covered by Medicare.

We strongly advise you to take out comprehensive travel insurance. 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. Fully disclose any pre-existing medical

conditions in writing. It will save you worry and possible financial hardship. Medical costs overseas can be in the tens of thousands of dollars and many families have been burdened financially in paying these costs when things go wrong.

Compare insurance policies and make sure the cover you choose suits your needs and is valid for the whole time you'll be away. Always read the product disclosure statement carefully and make sure that you understand exactly what your travel insurance covers.

Be sure to confirm all details with your insurance provider and receive written confirmation of your policy.

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 immediate family or 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.

More information on travel insurance, including tips for choosing a policy that's right for you, visit **smartraveller.gov.au**.

Insurance for cruise passengers

Cruise passengers are strongly encouraged to take out travel insurance appropriate to their circumstances.

Medicare benefits are only payable to cruise passengers if you're travelling between two Australian ports. They are not payable for journeys between an Australian port and a foreign port or between two foreign ports.

Remember

Don't base your decision about taking out travel insurance on the assumption that 'it won't happen to me'. Accidents do happen.

Case study

Richard was a young Australian working in a US ski resort after travelling around the world. He had taken out travel insurance to cover his planned 12 months away. After earning enough money to stay on as a guest at the resort, he decided to defer his return to Australia by a week. Richard enjoyed skiing and the night life so much that he forgot to extend his 12-month comprehensive travel insurance policy, which expired three days before his return to Australia. On his second last day at the resort, he was hit by a car while crossing a road on his way to the ski fields and suffered serious head injuries. He was admitted unconscious to intensive care. A month after the accident, when Richard's family organised his return home, he was still in coma and could only be moved on a stretcher. His medical evacuation alone cost his family \$80,000.

Smartraveller tip

- ☑ If you extend your overseas travel, make sure you also extend your travel insurance policy – it could save you and your family thousands.

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.

More information on Australian passports can be found at 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.

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 with children or 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.

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 about what you can and cannot carry in your luggage is available from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority at www.casa.gov.au and the Australian Government's travel security website, 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.

People with disability

Remember that not all countries provide the same level of support for people with a disability as is available in Australia. Therefore, it's important to plan ahead:

- Book direct flights where possible and when making bookings allow plenty of time for any necessary transfers between planes or other forms of transport.
- Contact the local tourist authority to find out if the public transport system at your destination will provide you with adequate access.
- Contact relevant foreign missions to check rules and regulations about any items you're travelling with, such as a wheelchair, equipment/aids or medication.
- Don't make assumptions about your accommodation. Check that it's suitable for you before you arrive.
- If any of your aids need electric current, check the voltage used in the country you're visiting. Also check which adaptors are needed as plug configurations do change from country to country.

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** 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.

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 and 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, travel insurance policy, 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.

In some cultures conservative standards of dress and behaviour can apply; for example, people may be offended by revealing or inappropriate clothes. Breastfeeding in public 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.

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 health check-up at least six to eight weeks before you depart to find out if any vaccinations or further health checks are required for your destination.

Vaccinations

It's important that you discuss your personal travel plans with a health professional to ensure you have the correct vaccinations for your trip and any booster doses of childhood vaccinations you may need.

Vaccines can prevent you from contracting some diseases, but it's also important to remember:

- New vaccines are constantly being released but diseases continue to evolve.
- Vaccinations may be an entry requirement of some countries so check with the foreign mission of the countries you are intending to visit or transit. In some countries you may be refused entry or required to have the vaccination at the border. We recommend you seek medical advice from your GP or travel doctor and have any vaccinations prior to leaving Australia.
- It's never too late to vaccinate; however, some vaccines require a long period to take effect and more than one dose may be needed.
- You may need boosters for childhood vaccines.
- Health risks within a country can vary from one region to another and local authorities may be slow to announce outbreaks of disease.
- New diseases can appear suddenly, as happened with the outbreak of the pandemic influenza (H1N1) in 2009. Check the latest travel advice and travel bulletins for your destination before

you depart and while travelling so you can ensure you have the latest information.

- Common illnesses that travellers can pick up include those which result from eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Find out whether tap water and local food is safe to consume before you depart.
- There are a number of mosquito-borne diseases you can contract while overseas, particularly in tropical areas. Be sure to take measures to avoid being bitten such as wearing light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing that covers your arms and legs, regularly applying an appropriate insect repellent and staying in mosquito-proof accommodation.

To find out more about healthy travel and vaccinations, contact your nearest travel doctor or visit:

- World Health Organization – **www.who.int**
- Australian Immunisation Handbook– **www.immunise.health.gov.au**

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**.

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** or by calling the PBS information line on **1800 020 613**.

More information on travelling with medication is available at **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

- If you're currently taking prescription medication, continue to take it as directed by your doctor.
- Make up a small medical kit, including items such as headache tablets, antacids, antiseptic lotion, cotton wool, bandaids, latex gloves, safety pins, SPF 30+ sunscreen and an appropriate insect repellent.

- If your trip will involve an increase to your usual physical activity, such as a lot of walking, gradually build up your fitness (after receiving clearance from your doctor) weeks, or preferably months, before you depart.
- If you plan to travel to locations or undertake activities at high altitudes (>2,500 m) you should see your doctor prior to travel and get advice specific to your situation. Altitude sickness can affect anyone, even the physically fit.
- Find out whether essentials are readily available at your destination. In some countries supplies of feminine hygiene products, nappies and contraceptives, including condoms, can be unreliable or unavailable, so it may be best to stock up before you leave.
- Don't try to save luggage space by combining medications into one container. Keep all medication in the original container to avoid problems with customs officials.

In the air

- Keep a supply of important medication with you in case your luggage goes missing.
- Continue taking your prescribed medication.
- Factor the effects of jet lag into your itinerary.
- If you've been scuba diving, don't travel in an aircraft for at least 24 hours after your final dive.
- To help avoid deep vein thrombosis (DVT):
 - drink plenty of fluids (but avoid alcohol and caffeine)
 - stretch your feet and lower legs while seated
 - walk around the cabin at regular intervals.

On the ground

- Exercise within your limits—especially in hot climates.
- Where local tap water is not safe:
 - only use bottled water to drink and brush your teeth and always check the seal
 - don't put ice in drinks—freezing preserves germs, rather than kills them
 - avoid uncooked food, including salads and fruit that you cannot peel.
- Include rest time in your travel itinerary to recover from any fatigue.
- Wear comfortable shoes, a hat and sunscreen for sightseeing.
- Wear a pair of thongs when showering.
- Always take spare medication when going on excursions.
- Practice safe sex as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible infections are widespread in many countries.

Case study

Don and Claudia and their best friends Chris and Louise were talking and dreaming about safaris and climbing Mount Kilimanjaro for over 20 years. The time had come to realise their dream. Their travel agent had arranged tailored comprehensive travel insurance for all their needs. Their doctor had cleared their fitness and health conditions for their challenging trip to East Africa. They had a supply of medication for their respective minor health conditions and left Australia feeling well prepared. After having a fabulous time on safari in Kenya, everyone was looking forward to their climb up Kilimanjaro. Knowing that steep climbing triggers his asthma, Don put a ventolin respirator in his backpack and another one in the pocket of his trousers. On arrival at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro, the tour guide told his group to

leave their backpacks, drinks and all non-essential equipment in the bus as everything needed would be provided on the way to and back from the summit. About a third of the way through the climb, Don started to feel short of breath and realised that it was time to use his respirator to regain his breath. He couldn't find the one he had put in his pocket and started to get very worried because he hadn't taken the spare one from his backpack. He kept slowing down and breathing more heavily. Claudia realised what was happening and immediately gave him the spare respirator that she always carried. Don had fully recovered after 10 minutes and reached the summit with his friends. Claudia's simple planning ahead avoided a potential medical emergency for Don and the group was able to continue and enjoy their holiday together.

Smartraveller tip

- ☑ If you have a medical condition, make sure you plan ahead and be prepared.

Yellow fever

If you're travelling to Africa, South/Central America or the Caribbean you may be exposed to yellow fever. Yellow fever is a potentially fatal viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes. You should check with the foreign missions of the countries you intend visiting for any vaccination entry or exit requirements and discuss vaccination for yellow fever with your GP or travel doctor. For more information, visit **www.health.gov.au/yellowfever**.

HIV/AIDS

For more information on the spread of HIV/AIDS, visit **www.who.int/topics/hiv_aids/en**.

Deep vein thrombosis

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) can occur on long flights but simple actions can reduce the danger. For more information, visit the Civil Aviation Safety Authority website at www.casa.gov.au/airsafe/trip/.

Reciprocal health agreements

Australia has healthcare agreements with Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

These agreements allow 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:

- Healthcare agreements are no substitute for travel insurance. They won't cover you if a doctor recommends medical evacuation back to Australia.
- You'll only be covered by these healthcare agreements once you're in the specific country. Health problems which occur during travel to and from an agreement country are not covered.
- If you wish to be treated under the relevant reciprocal healthcare agreement, you must advise the medical staff in the country you're visiting. You'll need to provide the local authorities with:
 - your Australian passport or other passport which shows you're a permanent Australian resident
 - a valid Medicare card. If you don't have a valid Medicare card, or your card will expire while you're away, visit a Medicare office and arrange for a new card before travelling overseas.

Further information about health care when travelling overseas and international health agreements is available at the Medicare website, www.medicareaustralia.gov.au, or by calling **13 20 11**.

Department of Veterans' Affairs

If you receive a pension from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), it's 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 healthcare entitlements. A DVA 'gold card' or DVA healthcare card does not guarantee that DVA will cover your medical costs while you're overseas. Further information is available at www.dva.gov.au or by calling DVA on **13 32 54**.

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 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**.

Contact details for Australian missions overseas are available at **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**.

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
- Backpacking overseas
- Death overseas
- Dual nationals
- Living and working overseas
- Sexual assault overseas
- Travelling with children
- Travelling seniors
- 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

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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