

Be a safe tourist when you go abroad

Written by Andrew Daniels
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The world today encompasses very real concerns of crime, health risks, natural disasters and terrorism that can disrupt the best planned vacations. Travelers need to be aware of the risks they can face when vacationing to an unfamiliar territory.

Whether you are a student going on spring break, a family vacationing together or are traveling strictly for business, there are some items that you should ensure are checked off of your pre-trip list before you depart for your destination.

Protect Your Identity

Proof of identity and citizenship are critical while traveling abroad. Your personal safety, and ability to travel, will be at risk if your passport and other identification are lost or stolen. Remember to take a photocopy of your passport and other identification with you on your travels. Keep it in a safe place, in the event something happens to the original.

As soon as you know you are going to travel abroad, locate your passport and make sure all of the information is correct. If you were over age 16 when your passport was issued, it is valid for 10 years. If you were age 15 or younger when your passport was issued, your passport is valid for 5 years. If you need to apply for a passport, do so at least three months in advance of your trip to avoid fees associated with expediting the process.

Check for Travel Warnings and Advisories

The U.S. Department of State's website, www.travel.state.gov, should be your first stop when planning for international travel. The website will provide locations that currently have a travel warning or alert. There is also information about foreign countries' laws and policies as well as other international travel resources.

Even if you don't think the weather will stop you from a great vacation, it could delay your travel arrangements or even cancel them altogether due to a natural disaster. Check your destination's local weather forecast for storms and warnings. Remember to check on your travel status before leaving if the weather is bad in your departure or arrival area.

Register with the State Department

Register your travel plans with the State Department through a free online service at www.travelregistration.state.gov. All U.S. citizens travelling or residing abroad can provide travel and personal information to the State Department so that in an emergency situation, you can be contacted.

Insure Yourself

No one ever plans on getting sick or being hurt while traveling, but it could happen. Be prepared by reviewing your health insurance to find out if it will cover you in a foreign country.

If your health insurance does not cover you, there is the option of purchasing travel insurance.

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This insurance provides health coverage, protects you if your trip is delayed or cut short, or if you need to cancel your trip for one of the covered reasons such as illness or a natural disaster.

Contact Your Credit Card and Cell Phone Company

If you plan on using credit cards during your travel, alert your providers to your travel dates. This way they do not put a hold on or decline a purchase because they know that it is actually you using the card. It is also suggested to use credit cards rather than debit cards because credit companies offer fraud protection required by federal regulations.

If you plan on taking your cell phone with you, check with your provider to make sure your service will work wherever you go. There may be an extra charge for international or roaming calls or data services. Make sure that your phone is pre-programmed with important emergency numbers at home and you have a charger that will work where you're heading.

Make Arrangements for your Home and Animals

If you are leaving for a long period of time, it is best to alert a neighbor, nearby family member or friend of when you are leaving and returning. Ask them to keep an eye on your property and outside belongings. You may also want to consider having your house sitter pick up your mail or you can put a hold on your mail being delivered at the post office.

If your house sitter and your animals are familiar with each other, they could keep each other company while you're away. However, if not, a great alternative is sending your animal on their own retreat while you are gone. Many facilities offer great amenities to keep animals happy while their owners are away.

Andrew Daniels is a Vice President at AlliedBarton Security Services. AlliedBarton, www.alliedbarton.com, is the industry's premier provider of highly trained security personnel to many industries including higher education, commercial real estate, healthcare, residential communities, chemical/petrochemical, government, manufacturing and distribution, financial institutions, and shopping centers.