

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL RISKS:

Safety, Security, Threats

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American travelers should be increasingly alert to the hazards of overseas travel and should prepare ahead of time for the possible dangers. Terrorist attacks, kidnappings, air disasters, bombings, hotel fires, and ordinary street crimes are becoming more prevalent each year.

The State Dept. reports that the number of terrorist incidents involving American citizens is about 800 per year. The overall American death total from terrorism is over 400 persons.

Weeks and even months before you plan to travel to a foreign land, you should develop a systematic plan for handling travel hazards. This plan can be broken into three sections.

#1) PRE-FLIGHT PREPARATION

#2) IN-FLIGHT TRAVEL TIME

#3) ACTIVITIES ON FOREIGN SOIL

PRE-FLIGHT PREPARATION:

Vaccinations may be required before entering certain countries. The "WORLD STATUS MAP", updated on a monthly basis, lists what countries require colera, typhoid and yellow fever vaccination. It is available by writing:

WORLD STATUS MAP

P.O.Box 466

Merrifield, VA 22116

301-564-8473 [cost is \$6.00]

Plan to get these inoculations early. Some may require more than one inoculation which need to be given at least a week apart. And could be as much as a month apart. If you are going to areas with malaria you should start taking malaria prophylaxis pills two weeks before departure for them to be effective.

Another source for vaccine information is:

John Hopkins University,
The International Health Clinic,
Hampton House, Room 113,
624 North Broadway,
Baltimore ,MD 21205.

Call 301-955-8931 week days between 9am-5pm.

They offer a complete range of vaccines along with pre-trip and post-trip consultations with doctors who specialize in infectious diseases and international health.

Visas and passports should be obtained at least a month before departure.

When getting passport photos, always order extra copies on multiples of two. These extra photos might be used on visas, drivers permits, or for a new passport if yours is lost or stolen.

If you already have a valid passport, make sure that the old entry stamps will not cause you any problems when entering your country of destination. An Israeli entry stamp will not look good if you are planning a trip to an Arab country. If this is the case, get a new passport.

Terrorism is a major concern for travelers in these turbulent times. Actually, you are probably safer traveling abroad than walking down a city street at night in a major U.S. city. It is wise, however, to make plans in the event of a terrorist incident and learn ways to reduce your risk.

Keep a file at home and at the office that contains the following important items: your itinerary, including flight numbers and hours of departure, a photocopy of your airline ticket, passport, a record of your blood type and Rh factor, a list of special health conditions or medical restrictions, your eye-glass perscription, a photocopy or list of travelers check numbers and an emergency communication plan.

In the home file folder be sure to include a valid will, a record of financial affairs that require administration, a power of attorney over your financial affairs to your spouse or a designated person, checks and deposit slips for your joint account, your key to a joint safe-deposit-box, a photocopy of your credit cards, copies of your life and health insurance policies and instructions on what to do in case of hi-jacking or kidnapping: who to contact, what to say to the press ("company policy against interviews.....ect").

An emergency communications plan is a list of key-words or a code that you can keep in both home and office files and is used when kidnappers or terrorists permit you to speak or write to outsiders. Make the list short so you can memorize it. To help you remember the code list, the first letter of each word on the list should form a simple acronym. 'ALARMED' = I am in a city with street noises. Use as "don't be alarmed" 'SAD' = I am being beaten and/or tortured. Use as "sad to miss you" 'GIVE' = I am in a rural area with no street noise. Use as "give my love..." 'MANY' = I am among many armed captors. Use as "many thanks for your love and support" 'ALL RIGHT' = I am OK, well treated. Use as "I'm all right" 'GOOD' = I am injured or sick. Use as "I'm in good health" *note that the first letters of ALARMED, SAD, GIVE, MANY, ALL RIGHT, and GOOD spell out ASG-MAG (American Survival Guide Magazine). This acronym or any other word you can come up with will help you remember your set of code words.

IN-FLIGHT TRAVEL:

The National Transportation Safety Board,(NTSB), and many flight attendants say that the safest seats are in the rear of an airplane. While those seated in the rear of the airplane have a better chance of surviving the initial impact of the crash, prompt evacuation to escape fire and smoke is extremely important. Because fire will probably block exits on one side of the plane, aisle seats with quick access to exits on both sides and the rear are recommended.

Cotton and pure wool are good fabrics to wear while traveling aboard commercial jet aircraft. Synthetic fabric like polyester and nylon should be avoided. They tend to melt when exposed to fire, increasing the threat of injury.

A new product offered by Survival Products Inc. called "SURVIVAID" will increase your chances of escaping a fiery plane crash. Weighing less than 5 ounces and stored in a small plastic envelope measuring 5.5" X 8", Survivaaid is a flame proof hood that is placed over your head. It contains a passive filter that removes harmful particulate matter from the smoke and absorbs toxic fumes and gases. The SURVIVAID can be ordered for \$29.95 from:

SURVIVAL PRODUCTS INC.,
P.O.Box 100428,
Fort Worth, TX 76185
817-923-0300

This product can be also used to increase get-away time in an office or hotel fire.

During a hi-jacking incident, the safest seats are those located over the wing in the mid to aft section of the plane. Because the cockpit is where the terrorist will be concentrating their efforts, a seat near the rear, and not an isle seat, will be the safest.

The 1985 TWA hi-jacking of Flight 874 in Athens and the 1986 Pan Am hi-jacking of flight 73 in Karachi show that terrorist, after securing the plane, will single out Americans... especially government/military personnel for the roughest treatment or execution.

The terrorist will demand all passengers passports. Try to stall or delay handing over your passport by keeping it in your carry-on luggage in the overhead compartment. That way if the hi-jacker forces you to move to another seat, you will not have your passport with you.

Eventually you may have to give up your passport. Avoid carrying a briefcase of anything else that might signal to the terrorist that you might be a business traveler. If you carry an Official Passport, or a Diplomatic Passport, get a tourist pass-port also. Show this one if you are forced to surrender your passport.

ACTIVITIES ON FOREIGN SOIL

After passing through customs, you will need to find a taxi or bus to get you to your hotel. Walking out of the terminal with luggage in hand is one of the most risky times for a traveler. Airports are becoming increasingly crowded, and that makes it easier for pick-pockets and thieves. Carry your documents and money in a safe pocket or zipped away in your carry-on bag.

Once at your hotel, make sure you know where every exit is on your floor in case of fire or other disaster. Know where the fire exit is to go down and the exit to go up to the roof. The disastrous hotel fire in 1986 at the DuPont Hotel in Puerto Rico showed that this may be critical information needed to survive.

To avoid attention when out wandering around the city, dress as the natives dress. Act like you know where you are going even if you don't. Don't wear jewellery, and use a cheap watch to keep track of time.

If you are in a country with a possible terrorist threat, vary your routine and routes to avoid repetition. Avoid publicity or association with others who may be terrorist targets. Also don't let your office or hotel staff know your schedule or plans in advance. Your schedule should be known only to your family, those traveling with you and your client or host.

In countries where rioting is a problem, the safest action is to go away from the disturbance and stay indoors. If you are in the street when a shooting takes place, lie down immediately and cover your head with your arms. Don't get up until the shooting stops. Then get away as fast as possible. If you are in your hotel room when the shooting starts, close the curtains and put the mattress or bed against the window. Turn out the lights and get out of the danger area.

In a country with possible unrest it is wise to register at the U.S. Embassy the first thing after arrival. The U.S. Embassy can provide limited help in certain emergency situations. Should you require medical assistance in a foreign country, a list of English speaking doctors can be obtained. New passports can be issued for \$42.00 should yours become lost or stolen. The embassy will help locate missing Americans and can offer help in times of civil unrest and natural disaster.

Be careful to avoid legal problems during your stay. In many countries there are certain things you should not photograph: bridges, military installations, public buildings, etc. Be aware of these restrictions. Avoid anything to do with illegal drugs including marijuana and cocaine. The State Dept reports that over 900 Americans were arrested in 1985 for violations of local narcotic laws. 70% of these arrests were in Jamaica, Mexico, and the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, and West Germany.

If you are detained or arrested by the host country, ask to call your embassy. If the situation looks bad and there are onlookers, throw a hand full of business cards and shout for everyone to report your problem to the U.S. Embassy. Under international conventions you have the right to call your embassy. Continue to politely request this right.

International travel offers a unique view of the world and the benefits and pleasures available should be sought after. A knowledgeable and prepared traveler recognizes that travel does pose some risks. Taking steps to reduce those risks will help make your trip more pleasurable and memorable. -= END