

Essential Travel Safety Guide For backpackers



An A-Z Guide

Providing Peace of
Mind For Backpackers
(and their mums)

w.  **essential**
travel.co.uk

Introduction

Backpacking, whether it is a full on gap year or a few months of adventure, will be one of the most exciting things you ever do. It will provide many memories and anecdotes to look back on in later years; you'll make new friends, see things you never imagined, and stretch yourself into a whole new person.

But there will be scary moments. Hopefully these will be more of the the "which pocket did I put my passport in?" variety, but, it does help to be prepared and at least alert to some of the things you may encounter on your travels.

This is why we have gathered together some advice and ideas for dealing with some of the less than pleasurable situations you may come across, along with some suggestions to help you stay safe and healthy. We've organised these in an A-Z format so you can dip in as you need, or read right through to get the full safety picture.

We would also like to say a Special Thanks to Dr Anne Stirling of www.thanksdr.co.uk and Simon Ennals of www.simonennals.co.uk.

A GP of many years' experience, Anne was inspired by a course in Expedition and Wilderness Medicine to accompany the Raleigh International 091 Expedition to India in July and August 2009 as a volunteer manager/medic. Her experience on this project, working with and caring for a large group of young volunteers, has provided many of the basics for this

guide. Anne is now an online GP for Thanks Dr, which allows you to get online medical advice from a British GP wherever you may be in the world.

Simon has provided many of the photographs, and his breath-taking and beautiful photography has helped bring this guide alive.

Stay safe and above all, enjoy your travels!

The Essential Travel Team

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Seeing animals in their natural habitat can be breath-taking, but it is not without its dangers. Most of the time a healthy respect will do the trick: most animals want to stay out of your way as much as you want to stay out of theirs.

But there are potentially many dangerous animals out there (a kangaroo can dispense a hefty kick), and we've gathered together some safety suggestions for the usual hit list of dangerous creatures.

In all cases, if you are attacked/stung/bitten and need medical attention, it is advisable to telephone the 24 hour assistance helpline (if your policy is with Essential Travel you will find this on the inside cover of your policy). Our advisors will direct you to the most appropriate hospital in the area, and may be able to provide other assistance (yes, they really have heard all the stories).

“Do not go too far off the beaten track into unsafe areas thinking you are being adventurous.

Female, 21-25, Europe.

Crocodiles

There are usually plenty of warning signs of crocodile infested waters and if the locals advise you to avoid a certain area because of crocodiles then it is wise to listen.

Dusk and night time are hunting hours, so avoid swimming then.

Even if you are in a boat, be aware that crocs and alligators often attack fisherman and people on the shore. Keep arms and legs out of the water and stay vigilant. Stay away from the riverbank when navigating bends in the river. Thick bush can give these animals lots of cover so choose somewhere where you have a lot of visibility.

If you do see one, stay as far away as possible, and avoid nests if you come across one. If you are being chased, there is no other choice but to run away from the water and put as much distance between you and the croc as possible.

If you are caught:

- You must fight back
- Attack vulnerable parts of its body such as the eyes, nostrils and ears. If you can see a stick, oar or anything else you can use for a weapon, jam it into its eyes
- If your arm or leg is stuck in a crocodile's mouth, go for the palatal valve: a flap of tissue just behind the tongue that protects their throat when they are in the water. If you can attack this, it may let water into the croc's mouth and it will need to open it to avoid drowning.

Sharks

There are only three sharks that are dangerous to humans - the great white, the tiger and the bull shark, and attacks occur mostly in Florida, Australia, Hawaii, South Africa, and California.

Once again, listen to local advice and never go out alone, especially into areas you do not know well. It is best to stick to areas patrolled by lifeguards. Watch the flags: a green flag means it is fine to swim, a red flag means a shark has been spotted recently, and a white flag with a shark on it means "get out of the water right now".

Be aware that sharks come further inland to feed at dawn, dusk and night time so, again, avoid swimming at these

times. Also avoid swimming if you have any open wounds or are bleeding in any way.

Whilst sharks are primarily sea water creatures, they move into freshwater at times. The bull shark has been known to travel up rivers and there are stories of a spotting 500 miles up the Amazon.

Murky water, harbour entrances and stream mouths are often frequented by sharks so avoid these. Dolphins, seals and porpoises can also indicate sharks, as of course sharks may be doing just the same as them - hunting for their lunch. Likewise, it is best to stay clear of people who are fishing or spear fishing, and if you are fishing then remove all fish from the water and keep them well away from you.

Dull swimsuits and wetsuits are best. Sharks seem to be attracted to bright and loud colours or lots of contrast so leave the jewellery at home.

Black and white stripes apparently mimic poisonous predators and some surfers paint these on their boards for added peace of mind.

If you see a shark, it is best to (gracefully) move away. Avoid splashing, attacking the shark first or even attempting to photograph it. Whilst it may be great Facebook kudos, it simply isn't worth it.

And, if you are attacked:

- Get out of the water at once if you do feel something brush up against you
- Remember you need to avoid drowning while you fight off the shark
- Fight back. Kick. Punch. Most attacks aren't fatal but you will need to fight back
- Try to slow the shark right down - it may think it is drowning and release you
- Just like a crocodile, go for the eyes with anything you have, which may be your fingers
- Use your fist and aim for the snout as hard as you can

Spiders



There are deadly and dangerous spiders all over the world, from Brazil to Oz. Read up on what you might possibly find, what they look like and how to spot their bites.

Some tips for avoiding spiders in general:

- Spiders often lurk in dark corners so check out that cupboard before you delve in
- Outbuildings, sheds and garages are favourite spider spots
- Shake towels, blankets, sleeping bags and clothes, and check your bed before you get into it
- Bang out shoes before you put them on
- Most spiders bite when threatened so if you spot one, stay away

And if you are bitten:

Wash the area around the bite, try to stay calm and seek medical attention.

The main difference between spider bites and bites from fleas, mosquitoes and most mites is that spider bites will normally feel more sore than itchy.

Take note of what the spider looked like. If you can safely capture or kill it for identification, then all the better.

Remember, many people do not realise they have been bitten and attribute it to a splinter, scrape or insect bite. A simple way to spot a spider's bite against an insect's one is that it will have two puncture marks.

Get medical attention at once if you notice any of the following:

- Mild stinging sensation when bitten (or no pain at all)
- Slight swelling around small bite marks
- A dull, numbing pain progressing from the bite site to your abdomen and back (usually within an hour of being bitten)
- Severe cramping or rigidity in your abdominal muscles
- Flu-like symptoms
- Pain in your muscles and joints, abdomen or back
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dizziness and sweating
- Shakiness
- A rash
- Swelling

Anti-venom is usually widely available so as long as you do seek medical attention all should be fine. To avoid infection, do not scratch the bite!

Snakes



Like spiders, snakes generally leave you alone if you allow them the same consideration. But there are some common sense tips for minimizing the risk of being bitten.

- If you are walking, cover your legs and arms. This will help protect against insect bites and leeches as well
- Give snakes a chance to get out of your way by banging the ground ahead of you
- Avoid snake territory in the darkness. Snakes generally do not like the light.
- Do not provoke it but let it move away
- Avoid putting your hands into holes, dark cavities or cracks in rock. If something falls in, use a stick to get it out and be prepared that you may get more than you bargained for in terms of spiders or scorpions
- Even if the snake looks dead, avoid it
- Sea snakes are especially dangerous and should be avoided

Snake bites act in many different ways:

1. There may be local swelling around the bite and even bleeding, blood clots and blistering on the tissues around it
2. There may be general symptoms of feeling dizzy, sickness, trouble breathing, vomiting, fever, low blood pressure and shock
3. There are some venoms that paralyse nerves and result in paralysis including troubled breathing and swallowing
4. Finally, there are some venoms that can lead to shock and heart attacks

What to do

- Avoid panicking. The snake venom will travel through your body faster if your heart is pumping fast. For the same reason, do not drink alcohol or coffee
- Treat all snake bites as venomous unless you know otherwise
- Move away from the snake if it is still there but once you are safe keep still to slow the journey of venom throughout the body
- Do not apply a tourniquet (constricting device) unless you know that it is the right thing to do for that specific snake bite. There are more occasions where stopping the blood flow can cause complications than where it helps
- Remember what the snake looked like

- Clean the bite site or area where the snake's spittle may have landed
- Keep airways free and ease breathing. If there is danger of vomiting, sit up or help the victim to sit
- Be aware that shock can be dangerous in itself – keep warm
- Get medical attention at once and if possible; let them know you are on your way and describe the snake to them to help them identify the correct anti-venom
- Do not suck on the bite, cut the area around the bite or apply ice
- Do not administer anti-venom unless you are medically qualified as there is a danger of anaphylactic shock
- Remove restrictive bracelets, watches and anything else that might change blood flow

Jellyfish

While they may not look as scary as some of our other dangerous creatures, jellyfish well deserve to be on this list. There are over 2,000 species of jellyfish and 70 of them can seriously harm, even kill, you. Jellyfish tentacles have thousands of stinging cells, called nematocysts, which inject venom.

Even Spain has its fair share of jellyfish that could land you in the emergency department of the local hospital, but the most notorious areas for jellyfish are Northern Australia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Some jellyfish are so tiny that they can float in between a wet suit and your skin: these are called sea lice. If you are touched by one of the tentacles of the Box Jellyfish you could be dead within three minutes.

Be aware that:

- Some waters are known for harbouring jellyfish – avoid them
- A purple flag means that there are dangerous animals in the water – most likely jellyfish
- If you are going swimming or diving where there is a chance of coming across them, wear a wetsuit and rubber socks (verruca socks will do!) or even crocs or flip flops if you are paddling rather than swimming
- Jellyfish can still sting out of the water...even if they are dead. If you see one, let the lifeguard know so they can get rid of it
- If you suddenly run into some, try to stay as calm as possible as they shouldn't attack unless provoked or hunting
- Some countries sell a sea safe anti jellyfish lotion that will also protect you from sea lice and sea nettles
- There is anecdotal evidence that wearing tights helps as some stingers can't penetrate through the nylon.

What to do if stung:

- Get out of the water and away from the chance of being stung again
- Rinse the affected area with sea water (or vinegar if available) rather than fresh water

- Inform the lifeguard who may be able to help
- Do not rub sand onto the area
- Remove any tentacles (without touching them with bare skin) and check clothing
- Look out for allergic reactions such as difficulty breathing, nausea, or dizziness. Get medical attention if this happens

B

Budget for Backpacking



It is essential to investigate costs and prices for each country you are visiting. Even if you are planning to earn as you go, being able to cover your basic costs for as long as possible is essential. Do not forget to add in extras like scuba gear courses or equipment hire, car hire, and the occasional nice hotel stay.

A very basic list of things to consider includes:

- Airline tickets
- Visas and other documents
- Transportation in and around countries
- Accommodations
- Food
- Sight-seeing and museums
- Incidental expenses

If you are travelling alone and cannot split the cost of hotel rooms or car hire, remember you will need an even larger budget than someone travelling with a friend, partner or group.

Stash the Cash

We also recommend an emergency fund, just so you know you have the cash reserve to take it easy and lie up in a hotel for a few days if you feel unwell, or the option to change travel plans if things suddenly go awry. This doesn't have to be as dramatic as war breaking out. Even a romantic break up can suddenly turn everything on its head.

The boards on this [site](#) can give you an idea of what budget you'll need for the countries you will be visiting. If you can't see the information you need, just ask.



Crime

Of all the crimes you could be a victim of while travelling, pick pocketing is the most likely one.

If you are claiming on your travel insurance, you need to report any loss from theft to the local police within 24 hours of discovery and obtain a written report in order to verify your claim. If your passport has been stolen, you'll need to contact the closest British Embassy or consulate.

It is important not to worry too much though; just take some precautions to minimise the risk and enjoy your travels:

- Only carry the money you'll need for the day. If at all possible, keep everything else locked away in a safe at your hotel or hostel
- Fill in the emergency pages at the back of your passport
- Use zipped pockets or even a money belt
- Some travellers recommend keeping some money hidden in a different place, in your sock for instance, for emergencies. It also means that if you are a victim of mugging you can hand over your cash without leaving yourself totally penniless.
- Keep your baggage with you as much as possible. Of course there are times when it will be strapped to the roof of a bus and you'll get short shrift if you try and cling onto it in a crowded vehicle, but do beware of

overhead lockers on trains that people can open while you are snoozing. Likewise, if you are having a nap, stick your bag behind you or use it as a pillow.

- Make a photocopy of your passport and any other travel documents (including insurance) and store them separately.
- Keep your wallet in your front pocket rather than the back one.
- Split up credit cards, cash, and bank cards.
- Travel with a group if you can.
- If you suspect you are being followed, get into a public place (restaurant, shop, bar) as soon as you can.
- Avoid areas known to be dangerous. Visit the [FCO website](#) to assess where you are going.
- If you are in a hotel room, use the "do not disturb" sign while you are out, and keep the TV or radio on low.
- On public transport, sit close to the driver.

If you do leave your money or valuables unattended and not in safe or locked accommodation, this will invalidate your insurance.

Cons and Scams

Being conned, ripped off and scammed is part of the learning experience. You will often pay more for a taxi than a local ever would for instance. But a little foreknowledge on common scams might just help you not to fall for some of the most obvious ones.

Self protection Tips

Do not rush into decisions. The longer you have to think about something, the more chance your intuition will kick into play or you will gain enough knowledge to make an informed decision.

Watch what the locals are doing.

Without wanting to sound too paranoid, be sceptical about everything and everyone you do not know.

Find out what things should cost before you get there. Try not to make decisions or part with money when you are tired. This is hard to do when you are travelling and arriving at an airport or station in the early hours of the morning, but think through what you are going to do before you get there. Clothes can also protect you from pick pockets. Choosing trousers with zipable pockets offers that extra bit of protection against pickpockets.

Sites that sell security orientated clothing include:

www.clothingarts.com

www.scottevest.com

5 Common scams

Taxis: Prepaid taxis at airports that cost a lot more than the going rate, taxi drivers turning their meter off just before you reach the destination and journeys that take much longer than they should.

Tip: if you know where you will be staying, telephone them in advance and ask how much a taxi should normally cost.

Markets: If you are shopping at a tourist destination, expect tourist prices.

Tip: go off the beaten track and visit the backstreets.

Befriended: being befriended by a local who then asks you for monetary helps/presses goods on you and asks for a monetary gift in return is not uncommon.

Tip: Listen to your gut and remember your money is your lifeline. Practise saying no. Do not put yourself in situations and places where you feel pressured.

Restaurant bills: Inflated restaurant bills are not uncommon.

Tips: Always read for accuracy and (this is where knowing the local language comes in handy) check that they have actually included the dishes you ordered; not the most expensive ones on the menu.

Shops: Being handed the wrong change is not unheard of. Take your time to count and check through your change.

An eye-opening book on this subject is [Around The World in 80 Scams.](#)

Hassle

Beggars and street vendors can be a culture shock to new travellers. Everyone handles them differently, and you need to find a way that is comfortable for you. But a general consensus seems to be that you need to be firm and persistent. Say no and mean it. Carry on a conversation with your companion and ignore whoever is trying to get your attention. Look the other way: certainly not at what they are selling or whatever they want to show you as this implies either some interest or weakness and makes you a hot target. In short, do not engage with them.

“Keep safe... do not just automatically trust everyone you meet when you are travelling.

Female, 26 -30, Australasia.

Of course, when it comes to poverty, you may really want to help but there are other ways to do this without encouraging child labour or rewarding gangs.

Suggestions seasoned backpackers have had include:

- Getting involved with a local charity (or donating once you are back home)
- Offering some time teaching at a children's school
- Volunteering to help on a project
- Giving notepads and pens to children

Hijacks

Ways to Protect Yourself From Hi-jacking

1. Drive with car windows closed on busy streets
2. Never pick up hitchhikers
3. Keep all valuables out of sight
4. If you are coming up to a red traffic light, especially at night, slow down so that you only reach it when it turns green
5. If you come across obstacles in the road such as a rock, drive around or reverse and head into the opposite direction to avoid it
6. If someone is holding a gun or knife, just give them what they want. Whatever it is, it really is not worth your life
7. If you are attacked, inform the police, and your travel insurance company. You will need to complete a Police report to make a claim.

Being hijacked whilst on Public Transport can be extremely frightening. In these cases the perpetrators are almost always armed and, even if they have no intention of harming people, we all know situations can escalate and become out of control.

Sensible advice includes:

- Try to stay calm
- Watch the locals and follow what they do
- Do not bother hiding mobiles or money. If you are noticed the repercussions might be worse than if you just handed it over
- Avoid taking buses at night and ask locals about the safest way to travel
- It is said that the most dangerous point of a hijacking is at the start when the hijackers are tense and may behave irrationally to gain control. Avoid resistance or looking like a threat unless you know you will be successful
- Give yourself time to recover afterwards. It is a traumatic experience and you will need to process it.

D

Dangerous Sports

One exciting thing about travelling is that you may be tempted to try out things you'd never consider at home, and dangerous sports are a popular choice. You will need to check what sports are covered by your insurance policy. As a general rule, the more extreme it is, the less likely it is to be there. This doesn't mean that you can't get covered. You can speak to us on **0845 803 5434** and we can advise on the sports grade required.

In all sports and grades of cover, you will need to wear the correct safety wear and not take unnecessary risks.

“Do not partake in any extreme activities such as white water rafting before fully considering it. For example do not do it if you are not a strong swimmer.

– Female, 21-25, Australasia.



photo: Simon Ennals www.simonennals.co.uk

Whilst having the correct insurance cover is vital, staying safe in the first place is your no one concern. Dangerous doesn't have to mean you forget all about safety.

- Wear a helmet and other safety wear including knee pads, wrist pads etc. Wear clothes that protect
- Invest in a lesson
- Warm up. Cold muscles, tendons and ligaments are more vulnerable
- Join in with a group or at least one other person
- Check safety gear before you put it on
- Check out weather conditions
- Make sure your ankles are well supported
- Listen to your body. If you are tired, hung over or just under the weather, leave it for another day.

E

Embassies and Consulates

It should be easy to find out where these are before you go. While there will only be one Embassy in the country, often concentrating primarily on diplomatic relations, there may be more than one consulate, which is often more focused on practical help for the individual.

If you lose your passport you will have no choice but to visit your embassy or consulate, which can issue you with temporary papers. They do not, contrary to rumours, provide financial help to get you home, but they will help you contact a family member or friend who can help you. If you are victim of a crime, need medical assistance, have to urgently transfer money from the UK, or need legal help, your embassy or consulate can assist.

From a non-urgent point of view, if you decide you would like to stay longer in a country, your embassy or consulate can advise you on the associated paperwork. They can also help you pay your taxes or cast an absentee ballot.

Just do not bother them with stuff like hotel reservations or flight plans!

F

Friends



photo: Simon Ennals www.simonennals.co.uk

Despite the excitement of travel, it is not unusual to feel lonely or homesick. Whilst many people embrace the road as liberation from Facebook, Twitter, emails and whatever the social media of the moment may be, others enjoy staying in touch with those back home.

New Friends

If you are travelling alone, it is not difficult to make friends whilst backpacking – after all, you already have a lot in common. And there are good safety reasons to pair up or join a group of travellers, not to mention the fun ones too.

If you are out of practice making friends here are some things to think about:

- Get used to starting conversations. Talking to people is the first step to making a friend
- Choose hostels mentioned in guidebooks rather than something hidden away where there will be less people
- If you are at a hostel advertising activities, or day trips, consider going on one or even joining a backpacker bus tour
- Spend some time around the communal areas, rather than holed up on your own. The kitchen is often a good place!
- If it is not working out at a particular hostel, place or even country, just move on
- You can meet friends who are travelling to your destination online (maybe even before you go) at sites like the much used www.travbuddy.com

“Keep safe... Make sure someone always knows where you're going, even if it someone in your hostel room.

– female, 21-25, Australasia.

And Old Ones...

Keeping in contact with family and friends can be expensive, but there are ways around it.

Skype

Skype is a free service. You will be able to Skype family and friends from an internet café and many have webcams which allow those back home to see you and vice versa, which can be nice if you're ever feeling lonely. Skype can also make calls to landlines and mobiles, in case your parents or family are not at home or online. You will need to buy Skype credits, which you can do before you leave and top up while you are away.

Mobiles

If you prefer to take your mobile phone with you, there are certain things you must do before you leave. Phones need to be quad banded, which means they will be able to work anywhere in the world. You can easily get your phone unlocked in the UK, as it becomes expensive when you are away.

Roaming isn't cheap, but there are UK-based networks that offer attractive deals. You will need to set this up before you leave as it can take up to 3 weeks. When deciding on the best package, be aware of the tariffs and hidden costs.

Local Sims

The cheapest method is to buy a local sim card which is relatively cheap, and top up with credit as you need. This

way you are in control of your phone expenses. If you are travelling in a group or with a friend, it is best to all get local sim cards in order to keep in contact with each other. Local sim cards do not work in other countries, so you will need to get a new one in each different country and credit is non-transferable. Certain countries, like South Africa, may need proof of identification and further documentation from your hostel / hotel in order for you to get a local sim card. Do your research before you get there.

Phone Safety

There will be places that are poverty-stricken and overcrowded, and some people may see your nice new shiny electronics as an easy way to benefit. If something does happen to your mobile phone, you will need to get hold of your operator's customer service, and ask them to block your phone. For this reason, it is important to keep a record of your networks customer service number and your mobile phone serial number or IMEI number. This can be found on the original packaging, or behind the battery.

If you have been using your UK sim, you will need to get that cancelled immediately. If you are using a local sim, it is probably less hassle to just get another one, however you will lose your credit loaded on your phone. Your network operator may ask you for a password, so be sure to take this with you. Once you have spoken to your network provider, you will need to report the incident to the police within 24 hours of your phone being stolen / lost and report it to your travel insurance provider (using the emergency number provided in the front of this booklet) within a month.



Gap Year Safety Courses



Travel safety courses have become a bit of an industry, especially since Ewan McGregor took one before filming "Long Way Round". But a good course may be helpful in embedding or awakening some safety instinct. Participants can benefit from first person anecdotes and maybe even find some fellow travellers to pair up with.

And, if you are an anxious parent, sending your son or daughter on a gap year course may provide just that little extra peace of mind knowing that they will be able to recognise potentially dangerous situations, or even just deal properly with an infected wound.

Some travel safety courses we have spotted include:

www.ultimategapyear.co.uk

www.safegapyear.co.uk



Healthy Eating

Becoming sick or run down whilst you are travelling is no fun. And, whilst it is easy to stick to junk food, it is also hard on your budget so there's more than one reason for eating healthily.

Here are our top healthy eating tips:

- By keeping a large proportion of your diet to fruit and veg (washed well), you know you are going to be healthy, but they are also good for fibre and staving off constipation (a common side effect of travelling)
- You can have a lot of fun at street markets trying out the local produce so go forth and explore
- Try to find places where a cooked breakfast is included. It is amazing how eggs and bacon can set you up for the day and save you money sourcing it elsewhere
- Snacks like nuts and fresh fruit mean that you always have something while you are stuck at train stations and need something to keep going
- Bread, cheese and tomatoes always make a simple lunch (you can posh it up with a glass of red wine)
- Use the kitchens in hostels to experiment, eat healthily and make friends
- Tinned tuna is a handy and cheap source of protein
- You can always take a supply of vitamins and mineral tablets just for added peace of mind

- Dr Anne Stirling of Thanks Dr [www.thanksdr.co.uk] also suggests avoiding the following: ice cream as it is a high risk food in developing countries where it may not have been adequately refrigerated; shellfish and other seafood; milk products which may not be pasteurised and could prove a danger, and any food which has been kept lukewarm for a while.
- In short, boil it, cook it, peel or forget it!

Healthy eating is only half of the equation though. Lugging around a rucksack and jumping on and off public transport may feel the equivalent of a military boot camp workout but it is very easy to lose muscle mass very quickly if this is all you are doing.

Take any opportunity to do some exercise to keep you in peak condition. This could be a swim, volleyball on the beach, a game of footie with some locals, or hiring a bicycle and seeing the locality.

Bigger, faster, uglier, creepier insects are all part of the fun of travelling. Here are some tips on how to minimise their impact on you.

Bed bugs

Bed bugs are probably the most common insects travellers will come into contact with.

A bedbug infestation is not a result of lack of hygiene; they can live in clean environments as long as they have a host to feed off. It is a good idea to travel with a sheet and pillow case, which doesn't weigh much, can be placed as a protective layer to sleep on, but does not guarantee your bed will be bug free. If you take your own towels and bedding be sure to get them washed regularly. Bedbugs inject an anaesthetic when they bite you so you probably won't feel anything; however some people are sensitive or allergic to the chemical and will break out in a rash. This can cause raised welts that can last a couple weeks before clearing up. If this is the case, see a doctor who can give you prescription strength medicine. In most cases, these itchy red spots will last a few days and can be treated with a topical itch relief cream or oral antihistamine. Try to not scratch them as it will expose your skin to infection and can lead to scarring. Bedbugs are not contagious and are not harmful to you; however they can be a nuisance.

“The most dangerous thing I did...almost all the travelling on local transport in Nepal was dangerous but that was part of the experience. I think I should have informed more people about where exactly I was planning to be at different times. I travelled alone for a lot of the trip which always has the potential to be dangerous albeit liberating.

– female, 26-30, Australasia.

There are also insects that are home to more tropical areas that you should be aware of.

Scorpions

Scorpions live in a variety of habitats including rain forests, woodlands, deserts and grasslands. They can be commonly found in desert areas of North America, in Arizona, Mexico, northern and southern parts of Africa, the Middle East and India. Scorpions are nocturnal. During the day they hide in dark spots, under rocks and logs, and they can also hide in your clothes, towel, sleeping bags and shoes, so check before you use any of them. They prefer the warmer climates, where summer evenings reach 21C. Black scorpions, which are the most common, are usually lurking around while you are camping or hiking. Scorpions sting with their tails which can be extremely painful, causing swelling and possible death. Although most are not harmful to humans, it takes an expert to tell the difference, so be cautious towards all scorpions, as some people may be allergic to the venom.

If you do get stung, the safest course of action is to seek medical advice, call the emergency number found with your travel insurance policy and they will be able to direct you to the nearest medical centre. If possible the scorpion should be captured and taken with you so it can be identified. The sting can be extremely painful and will require painkilling treatment; placing ice on the bite is effective in dealing with the pain. Just remember that a scorpion will bite you if it feels threatened, so keep out of its way.

Bees and wasps

Bees and wasps do not sting unless they are annoyed. However, they can swarm and chase you with the intention of killing you. Both insects are capable of chasing you 300m and will continue attacking you for up to 10 hours.

So we advise the following:

- Do not swat bees or wasps, you will enrage them
- Do not kill a bee for no reason as you will set off its defence pheromone which will only attract unhappy bees seeking revenge
- Do not destroy their hive, they will definitely swarm you.
- If this does happen to you, keep calm, cover your head with your shirt and run to safety
- Run in a straight line and focus on getting to safety - either a sealed tent or car.
- Scrape or pull out the sting as soon as possible as a honey bee's sting can continue to pump venom 1 minute after stinging.
- Wasps inject a chemical called melittin when they sting that causes a sharp pain, and they can sting several times making them more dangerous.
- Apply an ice pack to the sting to help reduce pain. You can take an antihistamine to reduce swelling or itchiness and an anti-inflammatory painkiller.

- Those with wasp allergies may experience hives, swelling and even anaphylactic shock. Look out for headaches, fever, nausea, vomiting, swelling of the tongue or throat, difficulty breathing, drowsiness or unconsciousness. Our emergency call line can advise you on the next step in seeking medical help.

J

Jobs

You may find funds starting to get a little short, or it might be that you would like to stay longer and really immerse yourself in a country's culture. But there will probably be times when you will find yourself wanting to earn a bit of extra cash, or add a new skill to your CV.

Working visa

The first thing to do is check to see whether you can legally work in that country. You really do not want to run into legal hassles over a work permit. Your embassy or consulate is the best place to go for advice.

They can also give you guidance as to your rights as a worker, which is always useful.

Do remember to check out whether you will be covered by your travel insurance. If you are doing manual labour, you'll need our Grade Two Essential Travel insurance which covers you for manual labour, but at ground level only, with no operating of machinery.

If you have a specific skill, it may be possible to set yourself up with work before you leave. For more casual work, however, you'll need to apply on the spot. This could be bar work, hostel work, fruit picking, or teaching English. In many cases you won't be earning a great deal, but this can sometimes be a way to get a free bed or drinks and meet people from different cultures: a great thing to put on your CV.

Taking a TEFL course to teach English abroad can equip you to earn money as you travel

K

Kit

Keep your bag as small and light as possible. A small bag is easier to place under seats, manoeuvre whilst travelling and it is not fun taking a big bag on a motorbike or rickshaw. In some places you might even have to pay a surcharge for a large bag on public transport. At the very least you will annoy the other passengers.

“Keep safe... Always padlock your bag on international flights.

– female, 18-20, Australasia.

Get used to the idea of wearing a small selection of clothes. It is not as bad as it sounds and clothes can easily be washed and dried overnight.

Some essentials backpackers have recommended to us are:

- A micro fibre quick drying towel
- Swiss Army Knife (you can ditch the scissors in your first aid kit if you have one of these)
- Sarong
- Umbrella
- Plastic knife, fork and spoon
- Some backpackers suggest a sleeping bag. Even if you are not planning on camping, you may sometimes prefer to curl up in your own bag than sleep on a hostels sheets and blankets. They can also thicken up a wafer thin mattress and make great pillows for long journeys. Others prefer to rely on hostel linen and lose the extra weight.

- Travel size shampoos etc (these sort of things are widely available and often much cheaper to buy locally)
- Map and compass for the adventurous
- Torch
- Camping gear (if camping) including repair kit
- Spare glasses
- Padlock
- Pegs
- Pack of cards



Legal Help

You can land yourself in legal hot water without even knowing about it. Even holding hands can get you into trouble in some countries.

A June 2012 press release from the Foreign and Commonwealth office stated that:

“New figures reveal the number of British nationals arrested overseas has risen by 6% in the past year. Between April 2011 and March 2012, the Foreign Office (FCO) handled 6,015 arrest cases involving British nationals – up from 5,700 in the previous year. Drug arrests have also increased by 2% with the FCO handling 816 cases over the same period.”

And, of course, depending on where you are, prison conditions may be a lot worse than they are in the UK. Being insured for legal expenses is vital, and remember that your travel insurance company may be able to help you in other ways.

If you do find yourself in trouble, here's what to do next:

- Call your travel insurance helpline and embassy or consulate.
- In many cases, ignorance of the law is not a defence, so research and ask people
- If you are in a country where you do not speak the language insist on an English speaker or see if you can somehow get hold of a local who you have met to help you out
- Try to keep calm and stay polite. It is not always easy but it will help to stop things escalating
- If you can, check your personal items before they are taken away, and ask for a written list. Check that nothing has been added or taken away when they are returned
- Get legal advice before you sign anything
- Tell relatives or friends to contact the local British Consul or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London by telephoning **+44 (0) 207 008 1500**
- You might also want to contact Prisoners abroad, a charity for the imprisoned and their families www.prisonersabroad.org.uk

“The most dangerous thing I did...Doing the Tongariro crossing in slippers and shorts in torrential rain, when getting half way up and seeing hikers in all the proper gear turning back for safety reasons!! Possibly tubing and just generally not thinking about health and safety because we were backpackers and not in the UK - you become a ‘yes man’ and assume nothing bad will happen to you.

– Male, 21-25, Asia.

Drug laws differ the world over and it is one of the easiest ways to fall foul of the law. And you may find them much more regularly available than at home.

We are not about to preach, but drugs can land you into serious trouble. Some countries such as Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Iran and Algeria can impose the death penalty for some drug related offences, and in many other countries you may land up in prison, under far less than salubrious conditions. In some countries like Thailand there are dealers who have agreed to inform police of foreigners buying drugs in exchange for being allowed to continue dealing un-hassled.

Never carry bags or packages through customs for anyone else, pack your own bag and keep it within your sight at all times. Any prescription medicine you are carrying needs to have the appropriate prescription to back it up.



If you have an ongoing medical condition GP Anne Stirling of Thanks Dr [www.thanksdr.co.uk] recommends that you:

- Make sure your symptoms are well controlled before you leave
- Take enough medication for your trip and for any unexpected delays.
- Have a letter from your doctor and a copy of your prescription
- Tell your insurance company all about it
- Know what you will do if your condition deteriorates
- Ensure your medications are legal (e.g. codeine is illegal in Greece)

None of us want to think about it, but you never know when you might need medical treatment. It could be a minor as a small burn that still needs to be checked out, or a full on medical emergency.

If you do need medical help, worrying about how you are going to afford it is not going to help you recover.

If you do need to use your medical travel insurance, there are things you need to know that can make the whole process much smoother and quicker for you.

- If you can, call your insurance provider before you get assistance. As well as directing you to an appropriate hospital or clinic, our emergency service will explain what you need to do next.
- You need to declare at the time of booking, any medical information (conditions, pregnancy).
- Keep all records, receipts, copies of documents etc, even if they do not seem obviously necessary.

“Keep safe... Do not drink out of glass bottles - use a glass. They do not have the same bottle sterilisation standards

– Male, 21-25, Africa.

Accidents

You might not want to think about them, but accidents can severely disrupt your travel plans, maybe even put a stop to them.

Just in case

- Carry your insurance policy and insurance cards with you at all times
- Get the most expensive cover you can afford. If you need to be evacuated as a medical emergency this can be extremely expensive
- Research the emergency numbers for each country you are visiting, and have them with you at all times. Make sure you know how to call from your mobile as well as a landline. Having a list of embassy numbers is also handy, along with emergency numbers for your insurance company, bank and credit card company
- Learn how to say “I need help” and other basic phrases in the language of the country
- Investing in learning some basic first aid is a great idea – just being able to support your ankle properly if you hurt yourself hiking would be worth the investment
- Have a basic first aid kit
- Do not go swimming alone, or when drunk
- Travel with other people as much as possible
- If you are heading somewhere really remote consider hiring a guide

Dealing with an Accident

- Call your insurance company for guidance on where to seek treatment (Essential Travel no is **+44 (0)844 879 8317**, or **+44 (0) 208 763 4934**.
- Find someone who can speak the language and can accompany you to the hospital
- If you are wounded, do your best to wash the area. Use bottled water, and even antibacterial spray if you need to
- Use gauze from your first aid kit to protect the wound from dirt and maybe even insects
- If anything is in the wound, take it out with sterilised tweezers (you can sterilise them by holding them in a flame)
- Use ointment on insect bites
- If you think you have sprained something keep all weight off it until you get medical treatment and keep swollen feet, and limbs raised
- If you think you might have broken it, try and keep it as still as possible
- Request an English speaking nurse or doctor
- If you have been in a major accident, it makes sense to let your embassy know.

First Aid Kit

It might add a bit of extra weight to your pack, but a decent first aid kit should be non-negotiable. In the case of over the counter pills, check with your chemist for the right brand to suit you, and choose packs with a long sell by date.

“Always book your first night’s accommodation before you get to a new city/country as if you have been travelling you are likely to be tired and less alert and unsure of your surroundings and at your most vulnerable in a new place.

– Female, 21-25, South America.

Items we would suggest including are:

- Antihistamines for allergies, rashes and insect bites
- Dioralyte sachets for dehydration from diarrhoea
- Immodium can be helpful if you are physically travelling and get a bout of dodgy tummy. For full on stomach bugs, however, you will need to see a doctor
- Heartburn and antacid treatments if you suffer from this
- Painkillers of choice. Choose blister packs to keep them fresh
- Condoms
- Skin disinfectant for wounds and antiseptic wipes
- Bandages, plasters and maybe even blister plasters
- High protection sunblock and after sun cream
- You may like to bring your own syringes and needles if you will be travelling in areas that have a low standard of hygiene
- A thermometer, tweezers and scissors. Do not forget the latter shouldn't be in your hand luggage
- Antiseptic cream for bites and wounds
- Sterilised gauze
- Travel sickness pills if necessary
- Water purification tablets or even water filtering travel containers
- Mosquito repellent
- Tiger balm (for everything from repelling mosquitoes to soothing muscles)
- Wet wipes

Keep it all together in something light, hard-wearing and waterproof. A clear plastic box is ideal. If it is see-through it means customs officials can check out what is inside without pulling the whole lot out.

Once you have your kit, the important thing is to keep it with you. It is not going to do you any good if it is locked in a hostel's luggage room.

Immunisation

You need this for your travel insurance or it will be invalidated

There are a number of vaccination shots that are available free on the NHS. These include polio, typhoid, cholera and the first dose of Hepatitis A. Many GP's do not require you to pay for the second booster shot. It is important to get both the vaccine and the booster, as it is the combination of both shots that build your immune system to the necessary protection levels.

Dr Anne Stirling points out that "your own GP will be able to advise you on what vaccinations (jabs) or other preventative medications (like malaria tablets) you may need to take. It is also worth checking that you are up to date with standard vaccinations e.g. tetanus, diphtheria, polio and measles."

Diseases that can be effectively vaccinated against include typhoid, hepatitis A, Japanese B encephalitis, yellow fever and hepatitis B. You may need proof of Yellow Fever vaccination in order to enter certain countries. Hepatitis B vaccination takes four to six months to complete.

For further country-specific information on health and safety abroad, visit the FCO for more information.
www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/staying-safe/health/

Malaria

Malaria is commonly found in tropical climates. The FCO is a good place to find out if there's a risk in the area you are visiting. There is no vaccination, but you will find a large range of tablets that considerably reduce the risk of infection. Malaria is transmitted through an infected mosquito, so on top of your medication, wear insect repellent at night and sleep under a mosquito net. The more recent medication, like Malarone, has no side effects and lasts for up to 28 days.

GP Anne Stirling stresses that "mosquito treatment needs to be taken before, during and after exposure. Your GP or Travel Clinic will advise you which tablets are appropriate for your area of travel and how they must be taken. Personal protection is vital and remember that prophylaxis is not absolute. If Doxycycline is your medication of choice, remember to swallow it upright, either sitting or standing, with a good amount of water. If it sticks in your gullet it can cause a really nasty painful ulcer. Travellers to remote areas are further advised to take a course of malaria treatment in their travel packs. If you develop a febrile illness (fever) within one year of being in an endemic area, and particularly within 3 months, it is essential that you seek medical advice and mention your exposure to malaria. Some authorities would suggest that the risk may be as long as 2 years."

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis, or as TB, is found across the world. It is more common in smaller communities, where close-quarter living settlements are found. China, India and most parts of Africa are common TB infected areas. It is spread by close contact; however this lung disease is not highly contagious, if you have been vaccinated and have a strong immune system you should be fine. If you are staying in small communities, small local housing or volunteering in rural areas, it is wise to take precautions. The Bacille-Calmette-Guerin, or BCG, vaccination is given to most children in the UK at an early-schooling age, and the vaccine lasts for up to ten years. However if you are not sure when you last had the jabs it is worth visiting your travel doctor as this disease can be fatal.

“The most dangerous thing I did...I went on the back of a motorbike with a stranger through landmine strewn rural Cambodia.

– Female, 21-25, South America.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a low risk liver disease found in most parts of the world, with the exception of Western Europe, Australasia and North America. A one-off vaccination against it offers up to a full year's protection. Make sure you are drinking safe or bottled water and you shouldn't be at risk.

Typhoid

Typhoid is most commonly spread by human waste infecting a water supply. In order to steer clear of this disease, it's best to monitor your food and water intake. Rural areas of developing countries are mostly affected, with parts of Papua New Guinea, Mauritania and Madagascar being high risk locations. There are two types of Typhoid vaccinations available, an injection which lasts up to 3 years and pill form, which lasts up to 1 year. Even with the vaccination it is important that your food is cooked properly and your water is purified or bottled, or boiled for one minute and allowed to cool down.

Meningitis

There are two kinds of Meningitis to be aware of: viral and bacterial. Viral meningitis is low risk and can be cured with over-the-counter medicine. Bacterial meningitis, however is life threatening. It needs to be treated immediately by doctors with strong antibiotics. The disease develops very quickly and if left untreated can advance into a life threatening coma. Symptoms to look out for include nausea, neck-ache, vomiting and a sudden rash. There are vaccinations available for certain strains of Meningitis, which will prevent several types. The best way to avoid Meningitis is to steer clear of crowded

places in known outbreak areas as it is spread by close contact with infected persons. The main risk area is known as Africa's meningitis belt, the area from Senegal to Ethiopia.

Rabies

Rabies is a fatal neurological disease that is spread by animals carrying the virus in their saliva. If you will be working / handling animals it is essential you get the vaccination. Even if you get bitten by any type of animal that is potentially rabid, you will need additional repeat courses of the vaccination. Scrub the wound well and use alcohol to clean the area.

“Keep safe... NEVER look lost. Always look like you know where you're going, even if you don't.

– Male, 18-20, South America.

Cholera

The Cholera vaccination is available and will protect you for up to two years. It will also protect you against stomach bugs and traveller's diarrhoea. Cholera is a water-born disease and exists in areas where basic sanitation is low. Areas include places struck by natural disasters, political wars, urban slums and make-shift refugee camps. Travellers going abroad as aid workers or to get an authentic experience in a developing country need to be aware of the cholera risk.

Schistosomiasis

More commonly known as Bilharzia, this disease is caused by the Schistosoma worm, a parasite, which lives in bodies of water - lakes, rivers, waterfalls, dams. However, because it is not so common, areas affected by it normally offer some kind of warning. The highest risk areas include Africa, Lake Malawi, and parts of the Caribbean, South East Asia and the Middle East. It is essential to be aware of the disease - find out if your water supply has ever been infected if you aren't sure. It is easily curable, but as easily prevented. Treatment includes a short course of fast acting antibiotics that kill off the worm, the source of the disease. It can take up to 3 months for visible symptoms. Many GP's misdiagnose Bilharzia, so be sure to let them know where you've been and research areas you are planning on visiting.

Polio

The Polio vaccine is included in almost every childhood vaccination program around the world, so there should be no risk of contracting it even in high risk zones. However if

you are unsure about whether you have been for the correct shots, it is wise to contact your GP, if visiting high risk zones, which include Nigeria and parts of India.

Stomach Upsets

Stomach upsets probably go with the territory, to some extent, but it makes sense to do your best to avoid them. Drink bottled water, or juice or soda if you have to. Boil water for at least a minute to make it fit for drinking.

Tummy Sense

- Make sure you know your bottled water is safe. Do not drink anything that looks as though it might have been opened and refilled.
- Ask for your drinks without ice
- Eat hot foods while they are hot and cold foods while they are still cold.
- Listen to your gut instinct. If it is telling you the restaurant is filthy and not to be trusted, leave.
- Wash your hands often, especially before eating or handling your food.
- If you're on an excursion bring a travel hand sanitizer with you and use it frequently.
- Eat non-peeled fresh fruit and vegetables and wash them with bottled or boiled water.

GP Dr Anne Stirling points out that “traveller’s diarrhoea affects 20% to 60% of overseas travellers. Preventative measures are crucial. The most essential part of treatment is rehydration. Loperamide (imodium) is useful for symptomatic relief but should be used with caution. Your body uses diarrhoea as a way of ridding itself of the infectious agent so there is a risk with treating it that the infection may get worse. Do not take it if you have black stools, blood or pus in the stools or fever. Do not take it for more than two days in a row. Make sure you keep hydrated. Dilute your diorolyte correctly using clean water and aim to drink four sachets’ worth per day.”

Normal diarrhoea doesn’t usually go on past two or three days. If it lasts longer than this, you may have to get medical treatment.

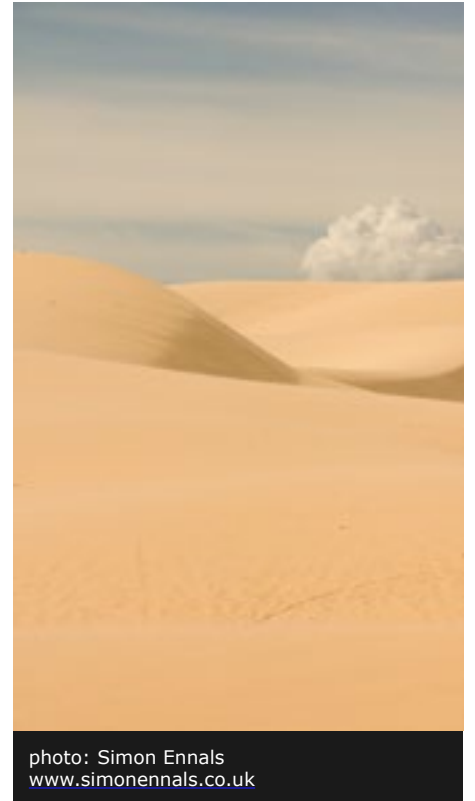
If you have any blood or pus in your stools or experience fever or dehydration you should seek medical advice and you might need antibiotics.

Conversely, you may find constipation to be the problem, in which case keep drinking water, eat lots of fruit, massage your stomach and try a gentle laxative if you really have to. Coffee often works a treat to get things moving.

Sun

Too much sun can put you out of action for a while: not a good idea. Short term effects of too much sun are dehydration and sunstroke, whilst skin cancer is another consideration.

- Avoid spending too long in the sun especially from 11am to 3pm
- Cover up with hat and sleeves, and use high protection sunscreen
- Be more careful if you have sensitive skin
- Water, sand and snow can reflect UV and increased precautions are necessary
- Do not be reassured by feeling cooled by water or wind as you could still be burning.
- Keep hydrated. Diorolyte can be used to treat sunstroke as well as diarrhoea.
- Alcohol is dehydrating so make sure you drink alcohol sensibly and have plenty of clean water in addition



Dental Care

GP Anne Stirling of Thanks Dr [www.thanksdr.co.uk] suggests "Make sure you have a check-up before you leave. Dental problems can become serious quickly and it is worth avoiding dental treatment in places where transmission of hepatitis B or HIV is a risk."

Dental emergencies can strike when you least expect it, and it simply isn't a fun experience to go through a dental procedure in a strange country, especially if you do not speak the language.

If you do find yourself in need of a dentist, your travel insurance should be your first point of call as they should be able to point you in the direction of an English speaking dentist. Hotel and hostel staff can also be helpful so do let them know your predicament.

Be Your Own Dentist

If you're far away from dental help, check out our emergency stop gaps:

- If you lose your tooth, keeping it in milk may help to maintain its surface and allow it to be implanted.
- If a cap comes off, put it back on if you can, to protect the tooth until you get to a dentist.
- If you lose a filling, a piece of sugar free gum in the gap can reduce the pain until you get treatment.

- A mild gum infection could clear up with nothing stronger than pain killers and some Corsodyl. But swelling and bleeding around the gums indicate something more serious, maybe even an abscess which will need to be drained.

Emergency dental care is included in our travel insurance.

NHS Health

Believe it or not, but the good old NHS is a great resource for travellers. You can get up to date medical and health information for destinations at Fit to Travel www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home.aspx

If you are travelling in Europe, you will need a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to free or reduced cost medical treatment in a European Economic area or Switzerland. All European Union countries are covered, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

If you are a UK resident you are eligible to apply for an EHIC and you can do that online here www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC/Pages/about-the-ehic.aspx or grab an application form from your local post office.

Treatment may not be to the same standard as NHS, however, and you may have to contribute to the cost of your care.

The EHIC card will not cover:

- Any costs incurred bringing you back to the UK
- Any healthcare or services not part of the country's healthcare system (such as an ambulance fee for taking you to hospital)

It is not a substitute for travel insurance.



Natural Disasters

It is rare for a natural disaster to blight your trip, but not unheard of. We hope you'll never need this advice, but hope you find it useful if you do.

If you are caught up in a natural disaster, your first reaction will be to panic, but staying calm is a priority. Likewise, try not to freeze. Keep alert and tune into your natural reactions. What can you do to get away from danger?

There are a whole host of natural disasters out there, so do check which ones may possibly arise in each country you visit.

Earthquake

If you are inside, get under something solid like a table and cover your head. Stay away from doorways and anything that might fall on you. Stay there until the earthquake is over.

If you are outside, get away from buildings or trees and move into the open. Get to your knees and stay there until the earthquake is over.

If you find yourself trapped, try to get attention by tapping or making a noise.

Tsunami

Areas vulnerable to tsunamis are coastal areas such as ports, beaches, lowlands, lagoons and estuaries.

You should know beforehand if the area you are visiting is vulnerable.

An earthquake can often precede a tsunami, so experiencing one indicates immediate evacuation if you are in a coastal area. Likewise, if the sea suddenly draws right back revealing expanses of sand there may well be a violent surge of water following. You may only have minutes to do this so do not worry about your possessions, just take action. You may also have to escape overland and on foot as roads could be blocked by traffic or debris from an earthquake.

If you do receive an official warning, take it seriously and take action. This could save your life.

Head for high land as far away from the coast as possible, or the nearest tall building if you are trapped.

Trees are only a last resort as they can be dragged under by the tsunami. Once you have escaped, keep clear until you hear an all clear. A tsunami may last hours with a number of waves. Official radio broadcasts are the best source of information.

If you do find yourself in the water, try to grab onto something that floats such as a log and wait for rescue.

There is a Chilean saying “El maremoto fue tan grande que hasta los muertos sacó de sus tumbas”, which is “The tsunami was so big that it even took the dead from their graves”. There will be utter chaos after a tsunami, with debris everywhere. This will include debris of houses, trees, dead bodies, and household items. It is likely that food and water will be contaminated and there may be risk of any of the following: diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever.

Post disaster food safety rules:

- Throw away food that may be contaminated by flood or storm water, anything that smells or looks odd, anything perishable that has been out of the fridge for more than 2 hours and any bulging or opened cans.
- Use boiled water (boiled for one minute) to wash dishes, prepare food, clean your teeth and of course, drink.

Avalanches

An avalanche of snow down a mountain side can reach massive speeds. They can occur on any slope under the right conditions and are most likely to happen during or after a significant snowfall. Storms are a dangerous time too, especially for the first 24 hours afterwards. The quick pileup of snow puts pressure on the snow beneath.

Check conditions before you go and avoid areas where there is evidence of recent snow movement.

Also be aware of:

- Snow collected by the wind, a cornice or icy overhanging on the top of a ridge.
- The sound of snow cracking or collapsing.
- Cracks in the snow after you have walked there.
- A hollow sound, as if you are walking on a drum.
- Avalanches are more likely to happen on slopes with an angle of 25 degrees or more.
- Follow in each other's tracks (if one person didn't trigger a slide then the next should be ok) but still with distance between you so as not to exert too much pressure in one place. According to National Geographic, in 90 per cent of avalanche incidents, the snow slides are triggered by the victim or someone in the victim's party.
- If the slope suddenly gets steep this could be dangerous.
- Stay away from areas with a cliff or narrow area below.
- Consider taking a shovel with you, or at least one between your group.

If you are caught:

- Get out of there as soon as possible by skiing or snowboarding away, but veering out of the snow path at the same time.
- Find a tree and hang on
- Fight to keep on top the snow as hard as possible. If you are buried by snow you will rely on someone else to find you.
- If snow is piling in, create space in front of you to breathe if possible. Make as much effort to push your way out before the snow packs together and becomes too hard to move.

Hurricanes

Luckily we usually have warning on hurricanes, but you have to still tune into the weather forecast to get them, so staying safe and aware of what is happening weather-wise is imperative wherever you are in the world.

Barometric Pressure will begin to drop about 36 hours before, winds will increase and gets stronger and stronger. The sea may swell and driving rain will fall non-stop. There may even be flooding. Listen for hurricane alerts and evacuate.

If this isn't possible, remember that once the hurricane hits, any windows will be the weak point. Protect them with plywood, and preferably find a room with no windows...even the loo would do!

Close all interior doors too, and keep curtains and blinds closed.

There will be a point, called the Eye of The Storm, where everything goes quiet and calmness reigns again. Do not be fooled. There will be another onslaught just as great as the last as the Eye moves on.

Even if you are not directly involved in a natural disaster, it can affect your travel plans (as in the case of the recent volcanic ash cloud in Europe). You will need to check your insurance policy to see if you are covered in such instances. In the case of Essential Travel, our customers are covered for delays due to volcanic ash under our superior policy for instance, so it might well pay to splurge a little extra to get the right insurance for you.

“The most dangerous thing I did...I did clamber over a live volcano in Guatemala, surrounded by molten lava - you could feel the heat beneath your feet. There isn't any health & safety in Central America!

– Female, 26-30, Central America.



Outdoors



photo: Simon Ennals www.simonennals.co.uk

Getting back to nature and sleeping outdoors can be a breath-taking experience, especially in warmer countries where you can, quite literally, sleep under the stars. If camping is part of your plans, here are a few basic safety tips to bear in mind.

- Look at the campsites' rules on open fires and barbecues before lighting up
- Try to arrive at your site before it gets dark so you can choose the best position. Make sure it is a sensible distance away from other tents and any fires they have lit. Six metres is a good rule.
- Avoid pitching right under a tree or next to open water.
- Never cook inside your tent
- Store gas canisters or refuel petrol outside the tent
- Make sure you know how to get your stove going before you leave. Likewise practice putting your tent up and down. You never know what weather you may have to do this in

- Always place the stove on a flat surface
- Use a torch rather than a naked flame
- Before you go to bed, damp down your fire and check your stove and any lamps are off
- Have a plan in case of fire
- Tents with bright coloured guy ropes are easier to spot and save you or someone else from flying over them
- Never approach wild animals
- Keep food cold to avoid food poisoning
- Always drink purified water, even if the stream looks clear
- A first aid kit is essential
- Always leave a plan with someone, especially if you are going off into the great wilderness
- If this is an official trail, sign in and out at designated spots.
- Know what potential hazards particular to that area could be waiting for you (wildlife, plants, trails).



Photography

If you are into photography, it can truly add another dimension to your backpacking experience. Simon Ennals, who took some of the photos in this guide, says "I wasn't hugely into landscape photography, but when you get it right you can really capture the atmosphere and magic of a place."

There are plenty of photography courses in far flung locations that you can do as part of your trip, or why not take a (probably less expensive!) course before you go to brush up

on your skills and make the most of this chance of a lifetime. It is worth noting that you do have to be careful in certain situations, as photography has got a fair few backpackers into trouble.

Taking people's photos without asking them is often considered rude. After all, you probably wouldn't like it, would you? A simple request is all it takes and people will appreciate your sensitivity.

More worrying, however, is the repercussions for taking photographs when you shouldn't be. Stories of travellers being arrested for taking pictures of official or military buildings, compounds and areas are rife. Practical advice is if in doubt, just do not do it.

“Do not travel anywhere by yourself without checking with the British Embassy first that it is relatively safe. Always get travel insurance. Be streetwise.

– Female, 21-25, Australasia.



Quitting

While travelling can be incredibly exciting, there may well be times when you will think of quitting. It may be that you're yearning for a soft bed and the latest Call of Duty release; or you could just be homesick. It happens to everyone at some time, especially if they find themselves on their own. But it is not a decision to make lightly. If it is the wrong decision, the effort and expense to make it back (if you can at all) will be tremendous. If you can hang on until you are 100% sure you are more likely to make the right decision.

Feeling the urge to quit?

- Move on. The excitement of a new place may just take your mind off it
- Make an extra special effort to make some new friends
- Join a tour: some structure may help
- Indulge your homesickness with a few calls to friends. Once you've heard them moaning about the weather and their jobs you might change your mind.
- Essential Travel's backpacker policy still covers you if you take one trip home, so, if you really need to do it, you can make an emergency visit, or just say catch up and enjoy a soft bed for a while

That being said, backpacking isn't for everyone. There's no shame in going home if you really want and need to. Indeed, forcing yourself to stay on and being unhappy is far more foolish.

You can never do too much research. You will feel more confident; you will be much more prepared for things that might happen along the way, and, most important of all, you will get much more out of your trip.

- Investigate the countries you are visiting and where the hotspots are. Know where you might run into trouble and what to do about it
- Research where you will be going once you get there and embed the route in your mind, or on a discreet piece of paper, rather than announcing you are lost to the world by standing in the street with your map
- Ask around and find out if the cut throat cheap bus tours are indeed carried out in a dangerously cut throat bus. There is usually the time to stall and play for time so that you can come to the right decision.
- Surf the net and purchase trips and accommodation in advance: this may save you money and also ensure that you won't run out of the money to get yourself home... you'll already have your ticket.
- Copy your international passport, driver's licence, travel insurance, airline tickets, travel itinerary, serial numbers of your mobile phone, camera and other electronic equipment you are planning on taking with you and emergency numbers. Keep these documents separate from your official documents and make additional copies and scatter them in different compartments of your luggage.

- Keep as many receipts and records as possible, specifically receipts for accommodation and travel incurred if you are stranded or need to make alternative travel arrangements. Scan these in and email them to yourself if possible.

“The most dangerous thing I did...Travelling across the Argentina-Brazil border without a visa, without permission and without telling anyone where I was going. REALLY stupid (in hindsight)!

– Male, 18-20, South America.

Languages

Being able to speak a little of someone else's language is a great way to really start to experience their culture. People also tend to be much warmer and welcoming if they can see you have made an effort, even if it is halting and involves a mixture of sign language and set phrases from a book.

If you are doing a round trip involving twelve separate non-English speaking countries, you might be a bit pushed to cover them all. But think of all the dead time at airports, train stations etc you can at least use to learn a little.

If you know you will be spending a reasonable amount of time in one country, rather than just travelling through, why not delve deeper. You can book yourself onto a short crash course, learn online, or find someone from that country before you go, and swap language practice.

If you are travelling with other people, you could even learn a different language each so that you have an "expert" in that country.

Even being able to ask and understand basic directions or say please and thank you goes an incredibly long way to getting a friendly reaction from the locals. It can also give a great boost to your self confidence.

Check out this site iphone.appstorm.net/roundups/lifestyle-roundups/80-apps-to-learn-a-new-language/ for a list of apps that can help. The BBC also has a great website that covers over 30 different languages: www.bbc.co.uk/languages/

Even if sex isn't on your mind at the moment, you never know what might happen along the way and you can't guarantee that A) you will be able to get hold of condoms when you need them, and B) that they will be any good anyway.

Even if you are on the contraceptive pill or use another form of protection, you'll need condoms to protect you from the possibility of HIV and STIs. Condoms should be purchased in the UK. Look for the European kitemark. Keep them away from light, sand and sun lotions!

Sex Quiz

- How do well you know this person? If you are disappearing off behind the sand dunes with a local, are you absolutely sure there isn't someone else out there waiting for you? Stories of people disappearing abound.
- Have you accepted food or drink from someone you do not know?
- If you are drinking with a stranger, have you kept your drink in your vision at all time?
- What is your body language saying? You are in a different culture now and although you may feel as though you are mildly flirting, you may, in reality, be giving out much stronger signals than you realise
- Do you have someone who can watch your back? Can you let them know where you are going?

- What do you really know about them? You may find yourself really falling for someone but do remember that, unlike at home, we do not have the luxury of asking around for gossip, details of past exes or other helpful information. On the road, you do not have that secondary information to help you make a decision.

That said, have fun!

“The most dangerous thing I did... Walked home after dark in South Africa; took a taxi into non-tourist area of Maputo in Mozambique; got chased by a pimp with a gun because I didn't give any business!

– Male, Africa.

Driving

If you have been used to waiting for buses and trains, driving in a foreign country can seem very luxurious, if not a little stressful. But, just like anything else, driving differs country to country, so it is worth researching both the laws and driving culture of each country you'll be visiting.

You may think it is ok to just observe the country's drink driving limit, but alcohol is a massive contributor to motor accidents, and, if you are found to be over the limit, will completely invalidate your policy.



photo: Simon Ennals
www.simonennals.co.uk

- Will you need an International Driving Permit?
- Do you know the road signs and speed limits for that country?
- Do be aware though that many nationalities drive differently in the flesh and whilst their rules may be simple, the reality is chaotic
- Check your insurance policy, especially if you are thinking of hiring a motorbike
- Always use a seatbelt if there is one
- Avoid driving at night if possible
- You must wear a helmet if you are on a motorbike or you will invalidate your policy (if you are going to do a lot of motorbike hiring, you might want to take one with you)
- Wearing a helmet for cycling isn't a bad idea either
- Avoid busy roads
- Avoid hitching in the back of pick up trucks and any other unsafe vehicles
- if you're involved in an accident, contact your insurer immediately
- Photograph any damage to your vehicle
- Hire from a reputable company
- If you have any concerns over any vehicle, whether it is a hire car or a bus that is going to take you to your next destination, do not get in.

Public Transport

While waiting around at stations, airports and bus terminals can be a tiring part of travelling, it is also the best place to meet fellow travellers, get the low down on different destinations, and people watch.

But it is also a time when you can be vulnerable. You could be tired, distracted by working out how to get to your destination, and laden down with a heavy and awkward backpack. So, of course, this is the time when you need to be most vigilant!

“Keep safe...Listen to your body and take a rest. We always rested on a Sunday and felt the benefit of it in the week ahead.

– Male, 26-30, Australasia

Hostels and Hotels

Whilst hostels are definitely the cheaper option for the solo traveller, if you are travelling with a partner or group, it may work out more cost effective to split the price of a cheap hotel room rather than sleeping in a dorm.

It is sensible to investigate how you will get to a hostel, especially if you will be arriving in the early hours of the morning or late at night. It may be worth staying somewhere closer, but safer to get to, just for the night, if you are not sure.

Do not just assume you can stop your safety precautions once you hit the hostel. It is not a nice thing to say, but you can be robbed in a hostel just as much as on the street. Keep your money on you; sleep with it even. Do not leave valuables in plain view and make use of the hostel's safe.

If a place feels and looks too dirty, then leave. When you stay somewhere, check out the emergency exits and spend a few seconds thinking through what you might do in the case of a fire or emergency.

If you are in a dorm and not getting on with someone, requesting a change of room or even moving on is by far the simplest option. Do not put up with a bad situation when you do not have to...remember you are on holiday!



Understanding Culture

Travelling allows you the opportunity to embrace unfamiliar circumstances and learn about all the different people that make up our world. However, ignoring these different customs and etiquettes can get an unsuspecting person into trouble.

“Keep safe...If you're not comfortable with something, go with your gut instinct.

– Female, 20-15 travelled Peru

Clothing

- If you are a woman travelling in the Middle East a simple rule is to cover up, and carrying a pashmina is a good idea. This is also useful in other countries where you might use it to cover your shoulders when visiting a church.

- More extreme countries include Iran where women (even non Muslims) must cover up from head to toe, (including a Hijab), with minimal makeup.
- Buying a lot of what you need locally often means you'll end up with more appropriate, cheaper and nicer clothes.
- Be sensitive to poverty. Wearing expensive branded clothes or carrying branded bags can mark you out as a rich target, even if the clothes or accessories are old.
- If you are in a cold climate, layers give you added warmth, as does that pashmina or shawl. Dark colours work better at hiding the dirt and are easier to dress up.
- There are also more subtle nuances, such as lucky colours, or colours associated with a particular region or even political party. Again, the best thing is to do your research.
- Avoid camouflage clothing. There are many countries where this will be seen as a threat and land you in deep water.

Eating

There are some strange customs centred around food that can have hidden meanings, here are a few to help you out in foreign places.

- When in China – use chopsticks! Even if you are a seasoned user, do not point or pierce your food with them. Rest your chopsticks on the table when breaking for a chat or a drink. Stick to these and you'll look like a real pro.
- When in Japan, try a bit of everything. If you are with a local or invited to a local for dinner, it is considered polite to try everything offered to you.

- If you find yourself in Tibet and invited by locals for a meal, do not be surprised if they stick their tongue out at you. It is a strange custom but it could make for an interesting experience.
- In Indonesia, people eat with their right hand. Their left hand is reserved for paperless toilets. We advise hand sanitizer in this case, however in order to fit in, stick to eating with one hand as eating with two is considered bad manners.
- Most Indian food is eaten with your fingers; if cutlery is provided it will generally be a fork and spoon. The cow is considered holy in India; you will usually find them walking the streets of rural places. Do not ask for beef; other options include fish, lamb and vegetarian dishes. If you are invited round by locals for dinner, wait to be told where to sit. Finishing all your food means you are still hungry.
- Peeling a banana for a woman in Russia means you are romantically attracted to her!
- In the Middle East, dining with a local means eating with one hand. Rice is scooped up and meat is broken off using your forefinger and thumb. Do not be afraid to get messy. Also note – if you finish all the food on your plate it will be filled immediately.
- You may get some stares if you attempt to cut a salad with a knife in France or Switzerland.

Greeting

The cultural etiquette when greeting people can make for some embarrassing and humorous cultural encounters.

British, Australians, New Zealanders and Germans will usually shake hands on arrival and departure. Do not be stunned when saying goodbye to an Italian thinking you're getting a handshake but get a kiss on both cheeks instead.

Greeting with a kiss can mean some nose fumbling. Scandinavians are happy with a single kiss, the French prefer a double, while Dutch, Belgians and Arabs go in for a triple kiss.

In Japan, handshakes, bear hugs and kisses are not an established tradition; these acts of bodily contact are considered impolite. Japanese people bow, the person with a higher status bowing less than the person with the least status.

Body language

The Chinese people consider it disrespectful to stare or look someone in the eye. Do not be offended if they avoid eye contact with you and look at the ground when greeting someone.

Japanese people will constantly smile and nod when listening to you speak. It is not because they are agreeing with everything you are saying but rather as a way to encourage you to keep on talking.

The head nod is a universal sign for 'yes' with a few exceptions. The Japanese use it as a symbol of politeness not always as agreement. In Bulgaria the head nod actually means 'no', the same in Albania, where the head shake means

'yes'. Chances are you'll be communicating in simple English so look out for this as it could get you into unwanted trouble.

If a Saudi man holds another man's hand in public it is a sign of mutual respect.

Europeans and Westerners blow their noses into a handkerchief or tissue while Asians and Japanese spit or snort; opposing cultures are disgusted by the opposite custom.

However it dates back to the spread of tuberculosis in past centuries. Westerners and Europeans blew their nose into a handkerchief, so as not to spread the disease. Although we think blowing our noses is more polite, it is actually considered more hygienic to spit. So best not to blow your nose in front of a Japanese or Chinese person and do not feel disgusted when you see them spit or snort in public.

Tipping

Tipping can get expensive when you are backpacking on a budget for months on end. In order to steer clear of these extra expenses, avoid hotels and taking taxis. If you want to treat yourself to a nice dinner or lunch, be aware that sit down restaurants usually require a tip, some come included with a service charge already added. If your waiter or waitress has tried hard to please you, regardless of the language barrier it is polite to leave a tip. However tips and service

charge are optional so if you feel you were treated badly, it is up to you to leave less than the required amount.

In the USA, restaurants will not usually add a service charge, however it is customary to add between 15 and 20%. In Canada, tipping is a common practice, however it is not necessary to tip anyone working over the counter but in restaurants it is expected. Generally tipping is common in South America.

The older generation in China regard tipping as an insult although with the younger generation of workers it is becoming more common.

In Japan, tipping is seen as an insult; sometimes there will be a tipping jar which indicates tipping is appropriate.

In Japan, tipping is seen as an insult; sometimes there will be a tipping jar which indicates tipping is appropriate.

Sometimes there is an envelope provided for tipping as handing over a tip is considered rude. Tipping is considered illegal in Vietnam and in Singapore it is not encouraged. In Malaysia and Thailand it is not common but is becoming more popular in resorts.

In India, taxi fares should be rounded up to the next 10 rupees. In restaurants service charge will usually be added, if it is not, you should leave a 10% tip. If you are served at a restaurant in Turkey you are expected to give a 10% tip, even

though no service charge is added. It is sometimes the case where people tip more for dinner than for lunch.

In Australia and New Zealand, tipping is not expected however many locals round up the bill to the nearest dollar.

When travelling within Europe the tipping etiquette is not always the same. In Denmark you are not expected to tip at all. In other countries it is customary to tip 5-10% extra over and above the added service charge, these places include Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Ukraine. In Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden, you should tip 10%, but only if there is no service charge. However in Switzerland and Romania you are merely expected to round off the bill. In Spain and Portugal, tipping is not required but appreciated. In Barcelona it is customary to tip 10% in restaurants and also to tip the nurses looking after you when in hospital.

While it would be impossible to put together a comprehensive list of do's and don'ts, we hope that this has given you some idea of how important it can be to investigate the etiquette of the country you are in. Sometimes logic and our own cultural experience is not enough!



Visas

Being a UK passport holder entitles you to travel and work freely within the European Union. If you are unsure of which countries fall in the EU – here is a list. www.europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm

Non-EU

Entry requirements for countries not in the EU usually require your passport to be valid for at least 6 – 12 months after your stay, and they will also require a minimum of two pages for entry and exit stamps.

Australia requires an electronic visa, which can be done at the travel agent. There are a number of countries that require a visa upon entry: Bangladesh, Egypt, Laos, Madagascar, Maldives, Vietnam and Taiwan. In this case there are no additional documents you need to keep with you, just make sure you budget these expenses into your trip.

Be careful of countries that require visas upon arrival; these are single entry visas and if you plan to travel around and enter the country a number of times you will be charged each time, which can eat away at your budget.

China, Cuba, India, Myanmar and Russia are some of the countries which require UK passport holders to obtain a visa before arrival. You will have to contact the relevant embassy

before you leave. Visas can take up to a couple of weeks to process, so it is worth doing your research early on. Most embassies need to see that you live, work or study in the UK and you are planning on returning home after your travels.

Requirements

Basic requirements include a residence address, utility bill or a letter from the bank with your name and an address.

Travel insurance is a requirement for most visas; in case anything happens to you in their country, you are covered financially. In determining your eligibility in returning to the UK, you will need either a return ticket, letter of university acceptance or a letter from your employer. Check and re-check your documents against a checklist: once you pay the fee and submit your documents to the embassy, you will not be refunded if your visa is denied.

No Visa?

Other countries that do not require a visa, have a maximum stay policy; if you are planning to stay longer than 3 months you will need a visa and will need to contact the embassy.

Most UK passport holders are able to visit America through the US Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) for up to 90 days for travel/tourism, certain types of business and transit. Previous criminal records will influence your eligibility to travel though the VWP and you may be denied entry if you do not have a

return ticket or travel literary illustrating you will not overstay the 90 day allowance. All qualified travellers will need to register no later than 72 hours before departure; you can do this through an online system known as the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA). This allows multiple entries for up to 2 years.

Working Visa

If you are going on an internship, language course, volunteer program or work experience outside of the EU, you will most probably need a working visa. Check with the programme organiser.

Beware!

Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Libya, Kuwait and Sudan do not recognise the Israeli State, and will therefore deny you entry if you have an Israeli stamp in your passport, even if your trip to Israel was years before. The same goes with having a Cuban stamp in your passport; this will result in possible trouble from the US authorities.

The laws are always changing so you need to be aware of these issues before you travel. If you are travelling to any of these countries, you could present a separate piece of paper that can be stamped and stapled into your passport. Do not lose this while you are in the country; this way the official stamps are not part of your passport.

It is not the responsibility of airlines to let you know of visa requirements when you book your flights; it is up to you, the traveller. If you are unsure – contact the relevant embassy or search on a reliable website. www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/passports1/entry-requirements



War Zones

Going to a known war zone will exclude you from your travel insurance, so do check out where to avoid on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website.

“Speak to travellers “coming the other way” to find out the stability of the region you’re going to. I was travelling developing countries, so there was always an unseen potential for things to go wrong.

– Male, 26-30, Asia

If you find yourself in an area where war has broken out, or seems a possibility, it is best to just leave as soon as possible, travelling to the nearest safe place, even if it wasn’t on the original itinerary. For this reason, talking to locals and keeping your ear to the ground for rumours is a vital part of looking after yourself while backpacking.



Young Families

There are a growing number of backpackers taking children with them and most of our advice applies to them too, especially the medical precautions which become even more important.

There are special considerations. Children may have a more sensitive stomach; you can’t just relax over a coffee or nap in the sun whenever you want, so you will be more tired, not to mention always on the alert to keep them out of danger. And organisation will have to become second nature!

But, an adventure like this is could have massive educational value to your child or children, not to mention bring you incredibly close as a family. And having a child with you can break down barriers the world over.

“Keep safe... I'll be boring but I would say if you are going to do any sort of extreme sport, make sure you do it with a reputable company.

– Male, 21-25, Australasia



Getting enough sleep may sound rather obvious, or even a little boring, but staying refreshed is vital to staying safe. Do not underestimate it! If you are roughing it, and finding it hard to sleep at hostels, be prepared to splash out now and again to get a sleep fix, have some alcohol-free nights each week, and if you are doing some serious travelling, cultivate the art of catnapping. This is good to do in groups or couples, where one of you can watch the gear whilst the others sleep.

Jet Lag

Jet lag can put a serious downer on your first few days in a new country, and some people do tend to suffer from it worse than others.

- Before you go: try to relax, eat well and avoid drinking the night before. Get a good night's sleep.
- If you're heading east, try going to bed earlier for a couple of nights before the flight or later if you are going west. It will give your body less of a shock to deal with.
- Many travellers think daytime flights result in less jetlag so consider if this could work for you.
- Keep hydrated, drinking water rather than tea, coffee or juices. Avoid alcohol if you can.
- Try to get some sleep if it is appropriate and won't throw your body clock out even more. Invest in whatever you need to get comfortable, whether it is earplugs or a blow up pillow.
- Do not stay still. Take a stroll up and down the aisle (even if you only pop to the toilet) every now and again and do some twisting or stretching exercises while you are up.
- Also stretch in your seat every now and again
- Reset your watch when you get on the plane and get into the mindset of your new travel zone as soon as possible.
- If you are stopping over, get off the plane if you can and go for a walk, preferably in the fresh air.
- Take a shower to get the circulation moving.
- Avoid sleeping pills. They dehydrate the body and raise the possibility of deep vein thrombosis. Eek!

Once you are there, resist the urge to nap and try to adopt the country's daily routine by eating when they do and sleeping (or at the very least going to bed) when they sleep.

A final word about travel insurance...

Insurance

The golden rule with insurance is to spend the most you can afford. A superior policy will cover you for more, leave you with less excess to pay (very important when on a tight budget), and cover you for personal liability in many cases where the cheaper policy won't.

Be careful to ensure you are covered for any sports and activities you want to do or try, and this may involve purchasing additional cover.

You can check out our various policies and their respective levels at www.essentialtravel.co.uk

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Useful telephone numbers

Essential Travel Emergency Assistance	+44 (0)208 763 4934
Essential Travel Claim Line	0871 895 0077
Essential Travel Customer Service	0845 803 5434
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	0845 850 2829 020 7008 1500
British Passport Office	0300 222 0000