

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of September 29, 2014 – Traveling Abroad

While the Middle East has been a hot bed of political activity for decades, it appears that the latest events have brought tensions to new heights. As we all know, the United States has formed a coalition with numerous countries to fight terrorist organizations that seem to be committed to performing horrendous acts against defenseless people.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the current foreign policy, indeed, “the ugly American” syndrome may be returning in a big way. This means that, if and when, we visit foreign lands there a number of things that we need to do to ensure our safety. The State Department recommends the following:

- Pack light so you can move more quickly and have a free hand when you need it.
- Carry a minimum number of valuables and plan places to conceal them.
- Use covered luggage tags to avoid casual observation of your identity and nationality.
- Avoid packing IDs, tickets and other vital documents in backpacks or other locations you won't be able to see at all times.

Make two photocopies of all your travel documents in case your documents are lost or stolen. Leave one copy with a friend or relative at home. It is always a great idea to let at least one person know exactly where you will be staying and how to contact you in an emergency. Carry the other copy with you stored separately from the originals. Documents to make copies of include:

Passport ID page	Foreign visa (if applicable)
Itinerary	Hotel confirmation
Airline ticket	Driver's license
Credit cards brought on the trip	Traveler's check serial numbers

Check and understand the exchange rate before you travel. Before you leave, notify your bank, credit card companies or other financial institutions that you are going overseas. Avoid carrying cash and consider using traveler's checks or major credit cards instead (but make sure they are accepted at your destination before departing on your trip). If you plan on using traveler's checks, use them as you NEED them (do not cash more than you need at once). Of course, do not flash large amounts of money when paying a bill.

Learn about local laws and customs. While traveling, you are subject to the local laws even if you are a U.S. citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different from our own and it is very important to know what's legal and what's not. If you break local laws while abroad, your U.S. passport won't help you avoid arrest or prosecution, and the U.S. Embassy cannot get you out of jail.

Avoid looking like a tourist! Don't dress like you're ready to surf or going to a Cowboys football game! Here are a number of things to avoid wearing:

- Excessive or expensive-looking jewelry
- A nice pair of sneakers (especially white ones) - You might be tempted to because you might be doing a lot of walking, but a nice pair of sneakers will show people that you are indeed a tourist (which makes you look like a target to thieves). If you must wear sneakers, make sure that they are not the type that would attract attention.
- Fanny pack - A pickpocket could easily unzip (or take a knife to) and empty the contents of the fanny pack without you being aware.
- Tote bags imprinted with a tour group operator name or symbol
- Obviously new apparel



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- Electronics - If you must bring them, put them in the oldest, most beaten-up backpack you can find.

If you are on your own, try to befriend some other travelers. There is safety in numbers. If you are in a country where political conflicts are high, be extremely careful as tensions can suddenly erupt resulting in violence. If you find yourself in such a situation, do not go outside of where you are staying. The army may be called in as well. This can bring about devastating gunfights in the street. You may have to stay there for quite some time to let things calm down.

Do not take favors or help from strangers, especially while you go to exchange money. Try not to exchange your currency with illegal operators/agents. If the country speaks another language, at least learn to say "Please, Is there anyone who speaks English?" Your accent will be bad, but the locals will respect you for trying.

Be especially careful at night. This is the most dangerous time in any country. Do not go anywhere you don't know, and again, make sure you stick to well lit areas. It has been known for people (especially women) to be raped, murdered or kidnapped (a lot of these crimes taking place late at night). There's also the greater risk of drug and gang activity.

If you are traveling in a country with a history of foreign citizen kidnappings and suspect you might be a potential victim of a kidnapping, do not leave your hotel/place of residence at the same time every day. Change your daily routine. Do not use the same route to go to or from a specific destination (e.g. an office) every time.

In some countries there are laws that require hotels to hold guest passports (such as Italy, where handing over your passport overnight is usually perfectly safe). Offering a certified copy would be a proper substitute.

Before you visit a foreign country, visit the State Department website where Travel Warnings are posted. The site may recommend postponing travel to a country because of civil unrest, dangerous conditions, and terrorist activity or, in some cases, because the U.S. has no diplomatic relations with the country and may have great difficulty in assisting U.S. citizens in distress. Travel Alerts disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats or other relatively short-term or transnational conditions that could pose significant risks to you and affect your travel plans. The United States Department of State website is located at: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html>

Make sure you have the contact information for the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate where you are going. Consular duty personnel are available for emergency assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas and in Washington, D.C. Contact information for U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas may be found in our Country Specific Information pages. If your family needs to reach you because of an emergency at home or if they are worried about your welfare, they should call the Office of Overseas Citizens Services in Washington, D.C. at 1-888-407-4747 (during business hours) or 202-647-5225 (after hours). The State Department will relay the message to the consular officers in the country where you are. The consular officers will then try to locate you, pass on any urgent messages, and, if you wish, report back to your family in accordance with the Privacy Act.

Do Something Wonderful, People will imitate it

Albert Schweitzer (theologian, organist, philosopher, physician, and medical missionary in Africa)

