



Gallagher | CHARITABLE

Travel Safety Guidelines

Understand

No place on the planet is completely free from safety risks, including your own home. However, gaining understanding about the nature of risk in general, specific threats at your destination, and what you can do to minimize both general and specific risks can go a long way towards a safe trip.

- When traveling, don't take risks you wouldn't be comfortable taking at home. Be wary of possible threats wherever you are; relaxing on a warm beach can provide a false sense of security.
- You can't completely eliminate *all* risks to your safety, so focus your energy on taking preventative steps proportional to the actual risks. For example, while there is realistically nothing much you can do to predict and avoid random terrorist attacks, car accidents claim the lives of more travelers than random acts of terrorism around the world do, so focusing on traffic safety is more practical than avoiding random terrorist attacks.
- Gain knowledge about your destination. Learn about local customs, including those around appropriate dress, as well as [some key phrases in the local language](#) so that you can communicate. Learning about your destination will make you more aware of risks, help you to be better prepared to [deal with emergencies](#) that may occur, and will make your trip a lot easier in general.
- Although you may want to make local friends, always be extremely cautious with anyone who tries to assertively befriend you.
- Trust your instincts. If a situation just doesn't seem right to you, it probably isn't.
- To avoid crime, it can help to think like a criminal; understand whom a criminal might target. Criminals tend to target people from whom they believe they will most easily be able to get what they want, whether because the person appears submissive, physically vulnerable, distracted, or because they stick out for other reasons.

Get in

Before you get in to your destination, you should consider the following:

- It's always a good idea to check your foreign ministry's travel advisory for your destination, before setting off. The [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) in the UK, the [Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade](#) in Australia and [the Bureau of Consular Affairs](#) in the U.S., are excellent sources of current information, even if you are not a citizen of

*http://wikitravel.org/en/Stay_safe

those countries. In addition, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security runs a Web site for the [Overseas Security Advisory Council](#). Most OSAC content is members-only, but OSAC's Web site does have publicly available Crime and Safety Reports for nearly all countries (and in some instances, multiple cities within a country). These reports are updated each year and include vivid details of current crime trends in each country.

- Consider whether you're going to arrive during a good season weather-wise. For example, tropical storms can be a danger in various areas (hurricanes in the Caribbean area and southern United States, typhoons in Asia, especially along the coast from Vietnam to Japan) especially in hot weather, and tornadoes, sometimes called "twisters" can pose a danger to travelers in some parts of the world (especially in the [United States](#)), most often in spring and summer.
- [War zones or former war zones](#), often called hostile environments, are not the most obvious places for non-essential travel, but with the right preparation and experience they can provide the intrepid traveler with a unique experience. However, no one should visit a country in this category without seriously considering the risks and how to mitigate them. Tourists can be just as much a target of hostility as any military force. Indeed, tourists could be regarded as a soft target since they do not have the backup of a large organization. In recent times, tourists have been targeted in [Afghanistan](#), [Egypt](#) and [Kenya](#).
- Before travelling to a wild, remote area, consider that, in a world of 7 billion people, there's probably a reason why this area is uninhabited. Consider the risks, including wild animals and temperature swings, ensure you pack so as to be able to meet any likely difficulty (it may be difficult to summon help) and ensure that someone knows exactly where you plan to go and when you plan to be back.
- When traveling, never let your bags out of your sight, especially when you are crossing international borders. Do not offer to carry anything for another person unless you trust them absolutely. You could find yourself being used as a drug carrier without your knowledge, which will land you in a great deal of trouble. Unattended bags can also attract attention from authorities wary of bomb threats.
- When arriving at an unfamiliar destination, try to arrive during the day, if possible, rather than trying to find your way around at night.
- Consider [local laws on homosexuality](#) or age of consent that may have legal repercussions for you.

Get around

When on a bus or train:

- Stay near the driver/conductor/guard.

When riding in a taxi:

- Use licensed cabs, rather than private cars (*gypsy cabs*), even though they might be slightly more expensive.
- Always make sure the driver has turned on the meter if there is one, or negotiate the fare before the trip starts if there isn't.

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- When riding alone, sit behind the driver where it is more difficult for him to threaten or harm you.

When using a car:

- Don't drink and drive.
- Be aware of local traffic laws and regulations and follow them.
- Keep the car locked, including the trunk/boot—thieves can snatch bags at the traffic lights.
- Keep mobile phones, valuables out of sight—travel insurance may not cover items left in cars.
- Park in well lit places with no cover around the car—if there are bushes etc. thieves can work on the locks out of sight.
- Before getting into your car, check the back seat to ensure no-one's hiding there.
- Consider extending your insurance to cover all costs of window/windscreen replacement; it's not uncommon for thieves to just smash the glass to get in.

When walking:

- Orient yourself with a map before setting out, and take local advice on undesirable areas to walk in.

Mode of transport

The safest mode of transport depends on the country, and the trip particulars, and it can be very difficult to do a fair comparison. Statistics comparing forms of travel are usually given by distance travelled and not by time, and are crowded by urban mythology.

In western countries motorcoach, train and airplane accidents are a very unlikely way to be injured or killed while travelling.

See

Seeing the sights of the area will require you to get out of your hotel room and onto the streets, which in some areas carries a risk of violent crime.

- Keep your eyes open. If the area feels unsafe, is quiet, or if the area is heavily vandalized and there are groups of young people hanging around, avoid unnecessary risks and move on.
- Avoid street gangs, often recognizable as large groups of males, often wearing similar clothes or tattoos.
- Travel in a group, and look out for each other.
- If you are a victim of a fraud or scam, consider your circumstances carefully before aggressively confronting the scammer. A small monetary loss could escalate to something worse.
- Don't attempt to fight off a thief.

- Back alleys and quiet areas are interesting to explore, but there will be fewer people around to help you, and fewer people watching to deter violent crime.
- Natural hazards are not always indicated by signs and fences in some regions. Assess the risks of cliffs and rivers before venturing too close.

Buy

To buy anything, you'll need money, which may make you a target for theft. To reduce your risks:

- As much as possible, try to avoid looking like someone that a thief would target (remember, think like a criminal). To that end, don't flash wads of cash, or wear or carry expensive jewelry or valuables (keep those in the hotel safe).
- Follow local advice as to safe areas.
- Have copies of the information/photo page of your passport. Leave your passport in the hotel safe if that is available and permitted.
- Have an additional credit card and some cash separate from your wallet. Split everything up in such a way that if one wallet gets stolen you can still enjoy the trip.
- Be aware of [common scams](#). These are designed to get your money or business from you under false pretenses. They fall into three categories: overcharging you, deceiving you or coercing you into paying for a service you don't want, and outright theft.
- Take steps to protect yourself against [pickpockets](#), which are a hazard in many tourist destinations.

Eat

- Find out about the water quality, and if there is doubt either use bottled water (ensuring the seal hasn't been broken) or boil water vigorously for 2 minutes before using. Also make sure to avoid ice cubes in drinks. Check in advance, and don't rely on local advice.
- Use your best judgement about restaurants. If the place looks dodgy, eat somewhere else.
- Make sure food is fully cooked.
- Avoid dairy products, unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before eating. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand gel (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Don't eat plants or fungi that you find in the wild. Some poisonous species in some parts of the world closely resemble edible species in other parts of the world. There is also a risk they have been sprayed with pesticide or herbicide that can make you sick.

Drink

Taking part in a city's nightlife can be the highlight of a trip; however, nighttime is when the shady people of the city come out, so extra vigilance is necessary. If the nightlife isn't your thing back home, don't feel obligated to go out when travelling; the safest place to be at night is in your hotel room. If you do decide to go out, here are some tips:

- Try to avoid walking the streets alone after dark, or minimally stay in well-lit areas.
- Dress down, and don't flaunt your wealth.
- Try not to get too drunk. The risk of being a victim of violent crime and sexual assault increases if you are intoxicated.
- Avoid accepting drinks, meals or gifts purchased for you. It can create an expectation in the giver, and can also expose you to drink spiking etc.
- Avoid going back to a stranger's house, hotel, or any other location. If you wish to socialize in this way, ensure you have a familiar, public, and safe location that you can nominate.
- Avoid purchasing illegal drugs. The transaction is often a pretext for robbery, scams or worse.

Sleep

- Hotels can be dangerous places in case of fire. Check that there are two ways of escape from your room.

Stay healthy

- See your doctor before you travel. Ensure that you are healthy enough to do what you have planned, and check regarding disease exposure in the areas you will be visiting, and take appropriate precautions, such as getting vaccinated.
- If you decide to have new sexual relationships, always follow safe sex practices, and use a condom. The prevalence of AIDS varies between countries, but it exists everywhere, and unsafe sex will always be a lottery. The availability of birth control (condoms, BC pills, etc) varies from country to country. Bring adequate supplies from home.

Contact

- Let someone back home know where you are, and when you will next be in touch.
- Leave copies of your passport and travel insurance details with someone at home, it's also a good idea to carry a copy of your passport and any visas on you, ideally separate from your passport. This will ease your troubles with authorities if you lose it, and handing over a photocopy to potentially corrupt officials is a good way to deal with a potential blackmail situation.
- Also consider taking a digital scan of your passport and important travel documents and storing it electronically - this can be as simple as emailing it to yourself, but the scan should be stored in an encrypted file.
- Consider carrying a mobile communication method that will work in your destination. Check if your mobile phone will roam, and if there is coverage at your destination. Even a non-roaming phone can be used for emergency calls on a compatible network. Consider renting a satellite phone in remote areas.
- Register with your embassy or relevant government department - some countries provide an online facility for doing this.

Local laws

Every country has its own different set of laws, and in some cases such as [Australia](#) and the [United States](#), the laws can vary between different parts of the country. As a result, something that might be perfectly acceptable at one destination can land you in jail at another. Always be aware of the local laws before you travel, as most countries will not entertain requests from another country's government to exempt their citizens (e.g. An American teenager was caned for vandalism in Singapore despite official protests by the American government). Ignorance is rarely an acceptable excuse.

This applies particularly to drugs, and what may pass the afternoon in the comfort of a coffee shop in [Amsterdam](#) may land you in jail in [Florida](#) or on the death row in [Singapore](#). Many Asian countries impose the death penalty for trafficking even minute amounts of illicit drugs.