Safety and Security

Traveler Summary

Key Points

- **Pretravel preparation**: Research destination for information regarding use of credit cards or accessing ATMs, sociopolitical unrest, crimes against tourists (including scams), restrictions on photography, and natural disasters. Scan passports, carry extra photographs, and leave copies with family at home. Register online with the relevant diplomatic service prior to or on upon arrival. Carry the embassy telephone number.
- **Safety during travel**: Avoid demonstrations, alleys, and crowded transportation. Do not accept food or any beverages from strangers and never leave food or beverages unattended. Avoid obvious displays of wealth. Do not resist if accosted by thieves.
- **Hotel safety**: Request rooms on mid-level floors (third to sixth floors are optimal), keep door locked, and do not advertise the room number. Determine where the emergency exits are located in hotels. Learn emergency procedures on ships and ferries.
- **Vehicular safety**: Motor vehicle accidents are a leading cause of traveler death. Do not drink and drive. Hire cars without agency markings. Reject cars without seat belts; bring child safety seats from home to ensure proper size. Keep doors locked and windows up. Do not randomly hail cabs on the street; use only registered radio taxis or reputable taxi apps. Avoid driving at night.
- **Recreational safety**: Learn about the risk of local currents, including rip currents, tides, and other water hazards (such as toxic algae and marine life). Never dive or snorkel alone. Avoid swimming in contaminated water. Wear life preservers on small vessels, especially if unable to swim. Avoid hiring or riding motorcycles or scooters; use a helmet if this advice is not heeded.

Personal Safety and Crime Avoidance

Before Departure

- Read ***Safety and Security*** for the planned destination(s).
- Scan the news media for events and developments pertinent to the destination.
- Consult a government office (such as the US Department of State) that supplies travel information for advisories on political or civil unrest, criminal activity against tourists, natural disasters, etc.
- Learn the best ways to avoid becoming a victim of sexual assault.
- Research common local scams and distraction techniques.
- Study the rules and regulations of the destination. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than they are at home. Drug violations, firearms possession, photography of government or military installations, and purchases of cultural artifacts or antiques are frequent causes of detention by local authorities.
- Become familiar with entry requirements. Border officials, especially at land crossings in a small number of African countries, may request a bribe for failure to produce proof of yellow fever vaccination despite the lack of an entry requirement.
- Research the alternatives to carrying large amounts of cash. Determine whether travelers can or should use traveler's checks or credit cards, and plan accordingly.
- Know the phone number and location of the closest embassy or consulate and carry this information. Pack several passport-size photos in case the passport needs to be replaced.
- Know how local law enforcement agencies operate and where to go for help.
- Be familiar with local weather and how it may impact infrastructure, such as availability of power and road conditions.

Upon Arrival

- Seek advice from the hotel, tour operators, employers, and organizations regarding districts or regions to avoid.
- Map routes before setting out in order to avoid studying maps in the street.
- Leave a detailed itinerary with someone and register with the home country's embassy if staying for any length of time.
- Keep passports locked in a safe and carry a photocopy. Keep the passport number and issue details in a separate place.

While Out and About

- Avoid all demonstrations, which can turn violent, and be alert to curfews that may be imposed without warning. Do not travel to a region if there has recently been any significant civil disturbance. Security officials may respond to a demonstration/protest with riot control agents (RCA), which may be dispersed in an aerosol or liquid form. Exposed persons may feel effects on the skin, eyes, respiratory tract, and mucous membranes immediately upon contact. Most respiratory symptoms following exposure to these agents are mild and self-limited, although some persons may experience nausea and vomiting. Seek medical care if symptoms persist for more than 20 minutes after removal from exposure.
- Anyone who is exposed to an RCA should immediately leave the area and quickly find fresh air. As soon as possible, wipe the face with a damp towel; remove contaminated clothing, contact lenses, and glasses; and rinse the eyes and skin with copious amounts of water, washing the skin (and eyeglasses) with soap and water.
- Do not accept food or beverage offerings. They may contain sedatives to induce sleep and allow robbery to occur.
- Learn about local exchange rates and pay close attention to all monetary transactions. Exchanging money is sometimes seen as an easy way to deceive tourists. Avoid black market exchanges.
- Use extra caution in tourist sites, market places, elevators, crowded subways, train stations, and festivals, and avoid marginal areas of cities. Be cautious of groups of small children that may act as distractions to facilitate robberies. Avoid alleys, poorly lit streets, and walking alone at night.
- Keep a hand free for protection. Specific targets for thieves are shoulder bags, outside pouches of backpacks, and cameras that hang from straps. Wear them under a jacket or shirt. Do not hand luggage or personal belongings to anyone who cannot be directly supervised or observed.
- Be constantly attentive to surroundings and be wary of any stranger who tries to engage in any form of conversation or initiates contact in any way, no matter how accidental the contact may appear to be. Never discuss travel plans with strangers.
- If confronted, give up valuables. Money and passports can be replaced; people cannot.
- Don't wear expensive clothing or jewelry, and don't carry expensive cameras or other electronics. Avoid clothing that declares nationality or political beliefs.
- Avoid being intoxicated at night on the street. Use a registered taxi.
- Be aware of road traffic, even if not in a vehicle. Pedestrians unfamiliar with local traffic patterns can easily become accident victims.

While in the Hotel

- If possible, stay on floors 3 to 6, which are generally regarded as optimal for safety and security.
- Look for fire safety instructions and become familiar with escape routes.
- Keep the door locked at all times. Always sleep in locked and secured accommodations.
- Avoid sharing rooms with strangers.
- Meet visitors in the lobby.
- Don't advertise room numbers. When out of the hotel leave room keys with the concierge.
- Keep valuables in the hotel safe. Room safes are less secure.
- Inform someone, including the front desk, of an anticipated return time if going out late at night.
- Do not use electrical equipment in the bathroom if the floor is wet.

Water and Adventure Safety

- Currents, tides, and underwater hazards pose a risk to swimmers and can lead to drowning. Designated or supervised areas pose the least risk.
- Recognize rip currents as a calm area with flat sandy water in front of the beach where the waves are not breaking and a line of white foam moves steadily seaward. Stay afloat, wave and yell for help, and swim parallel to the shore. Do not swim directly against the current in an attempt to get immediately back to shore; doing so may lead to exhaustion and drowning.
- Always check water depth before jumping or diving in order to avoid spinal injury.
- Do not dive or snorkel alone.
- Don't combine alcohol consumption with water sports or activities. Accidents and drowning may occur.
- If traveling with children to accommodations with a pool or other swimming facilities, make sure the water is in a fenced-off area with childproof access and provide constant supervision.
- Do not swim in water with sewage contamination or algae.
- When traveling on a ferry or ship, learn the evacuation procedures and where the life belts are stowed.

- Wear a life jacket in small boats. Those who can't swim should take particular care. Don't depend on flotation devices or swimmer aids.
- Do not walk on any beach after dark, no matter how busy, well lit, or well patrolled it appears.
- Rent water sports equipment from reputable operators only. Inquire about insurance coverage and insist on proper training before using the equipment.
- Be alert to the threat of piracy. Mariners should take appropriate precautions.
- Maintain a safe distance when observing wildlife.

Motor Vehicle and Road Safety

When Traveling by Car

- Motor vehicle collisions result in more traveler deaths than crime or terrorism. Country-specific risk of traffic-related injuries or fatalities is included under Travax destinations, Safety and Security.
- If possible, travel with a locally purchased or rented mobile telephone.
- Where appropriate, hire a local driver who is familiar with the terrain, the road rules, and customs. Inspect the vehicle for tire wear and general condition before closing the deal.
- When renting a car, avoid those with rental markings.
- Ensure the rental car is fitted with safety features such as seat belts, air bags (if at all possible), and relevant child protection.
- Don't drive when jet lagged or tired.
- Don't drink and drive.
- Don't drive at night.
- Don't pick up hitchhikers.
- Keep your car doors locked and windows rolled up when driving. Use cars with air conditioning.
- Car jacking and thefts happen when stopped at gas stations, parking lots, or in slow city traffic.
- Never hire or ride on motorcycles. Those who choose to do so should always wear a helmet.

Using Taxis and Public Transport

- Use only "registered" taxis, preferably radio taxis.
  - Negotiate the fee before entering the taxi.
  - Carry money in small denominations at all times, so that change is available for the taxi bill, reducing the risk of losing a large note.
  - Avoid sharing taxis with unknown passengers.
- Avoid overcrowded public transportation, when possible.
- Don't accept food offerings; they may contain sedatives to induce sleep and allow robbery to occur.
- If the driver is acting in an unsafe manner or appears intoxicated, disembark at the next stop. Better to be late than in an accident in a remote area.
- Keep luggage locked and in sight at all times.
- Beware of fraudulent porters who offer to carry luggage and then disappear with it.

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