Transportation

Traveler Summary

Introduction

Transportation choices are an important component of travel safety and advance research and planning are essential.

Review transportation options in advance: infrastructure may differ significantly from what travelers are accustomed to and some common modes of travel may be unsafe or unavailable.

Review the latest Safety and Security bulletins for both destination and transit countries: world events (e.g., political unrest, strikes, or terrorism) or natural disasters (e.g., floods or earthquakes) can abruptly disrupt or suspend transportation.

Modes of Transportation

Air Travel

Air Safety and Carrier Standards

- Research unfamiliar companies or airlines: not all commercial airlines meet international aviation safety standards.
- Avoid itineraries with connections that require transfer to uncertified local/regional airlines.
- Confirm domestic/private flights are run by legitimate, insured companies with certified pilots.

Road Travel

Driving Risks

- Become familiar with the destination's traffic safety and road conditions. Some destinations may be extremely hazardous, with potential risks including:
  - Higher rates of collisions and fatalities
  - Limited maintenance, lighting, or signage
  - Adverse weather (flooding, snow, ice)
  - Motorists who drive erratically or aggressively
  - A general disregard for traffic laws (including speed limits)
- Use local taxis, ride-hailing apps, and public transit rather than attempt to drive without local knowledge in unfamiliar countries.
- Consider driving only with sufficient local knowledge and
  - Avoid road travel at night or during periods of bad weather.
  - Allow extra travel time.

Driving and Local Laws

- Become familiar with local driving laws and the consequences: laws may differ significantly from those in travelers' home countries.
  - Determine if driving is allowed for nonresidents: driving may not be permitted with a foreign driving license.
  - Know the Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) laws: operating a vehicle above .00 BAC may be illegal and severely punished, including with immediate imprisonment.
  - Research whether operating a mobile phone while driving is illegal.
  - Be aware that some countries maintain military or law enforcement checkpoints where drivers are required to stop. Comply with local authorities and present all necessary documents.

Ride-Hailing Apps

Consider the following if opting to use app-based services such as Uber, Lyft, or Grab, which are widely available and usually provide a safer alternative to taxis:

- Verify the vehicle and driver match the details shown on the app before entering the vehicle.
- Insist on sitting in the backseat.
- Avoid paying cash if a card option is available.

- Do not permit drivers to make unscheduled stops or pick up additional passengers during the ride.
- Ensure child locks are not engaged and keep windows rolled up to prevent anyone from reaching inside.

Taxis

- Use only official, clearly marked taxis and arrange taxis through hotels or trusted providers when possible: unfamiliar companies may be unlicensed and unreliable.
- Avoid taxis without working meters: drivers may overcharge.
- Do not enter a taxi that is already occupied or allow drivers to pick up additional passengers.
- Insist on sitting in the backseat.
- Arrange advance pick-ups at airports: unlicensed drivers and scams are common.
- Women travelers should consider app-based ride-hailing services instead of taxis: taxi routes are not recorded or tracked if a driver diverts from the intended route.
- Ensure child locks are not engaged and keep windows rolled up to prevent anyone from reaching inside.

Public Utility Vehicles (Jeepneys/Tuk-Tuks/Rickshaws)

Consider safer alternatives, such as local taxis, ride-hailing apps, and public transit when available. Public utility vehicles may:

- Lack regulation
- Carry significant safety risks
- Operate in heavy traffic where accidents can be fatal
- Involve drivers who may attempt to exploit tourists

Public Transportation (Bus/Metro/Subway)

System Rules

- Research public transportation systems: some countries operate reliable, low-cost systems, whereas others have limited or informal networks.
- Become familiar with the system's rules:
  - Some fares must be prepaid, whereas others are collected at the end of the trip.
  - Some tickets must be carried at all times; inspectors may impose heavy fines for noncompliance.

Safety Risks

- Maintain situational awareness at all times and keep personal belongings secure: although generally safe and reliable, crimes and accidents can occur.
- Familiarize oneself with the route prior to travel: criminals may specifically target travelers who appear unfamiliar with the area or disoriented while riding.
- Exercise caution in overcrowded locations: overcrowding can create hazardous conditions.
- Women travelers should look for women-only train cars or designated waiting areas where available.

Water Transport (Ferry/Boat)

Vessel Safety

- Avoid vessels that appear overloaded or unseaworthy.
- Confirm life jackets and other required safety equipment are available before boarding.
- Use only reputable tour companies when booking excursions.

Self-Powered Options

Safe-Riding Practices

Travel by bicycle, electric scooter, or other self-powered/portable electric vehicles (PEV) may be convenient in some destinations.

Follow local rules and customs:

- Stay in designated lanes and use appropriate safety equipment.

- Park only in authorized areas and secure properly to prevent theft.

Pedestrian Safety

- Exercise increased caution when crossing roads while walking or running: motorists may not yield to pedestrians.
- Observe locals if traffic signals are confusing.

Transportation-Related Security Risks

Armed Conflict and Transportation Routes

- Carefully review Consular Travel Warnings or Safety Bulletins before entering any destination affected by conflict.
- Consider avoiding all travel to countries or regions experiencing armed conflict: vital infrastructure hubs or transportation routes may be deliberately targeted due to their strategic value.
- Use armored vehicles or convoys outside of designated safe zones or cities in unstable or unsafe areas.
- Avoid travel off main roads in areas where landmines and unexploded ordnance may be present.

Terrorist Attacks at Transportation Hubs

- Remain alert at all times and report suspicious behavior to local authorities immediately: terrorist violence is often random and designed to cause mass casualties.
- Be aware that risk exists even when travelers are not directly targeted.
- Recognize that transportation hubs, including airports, train stations, subway/metro stations, and bus terminals are frequent targets and common methods of attack include homemade explosives, vehicular ramming, firearms, or bladed weapons.
- Do not attempt to confront the attacker(s) if an attack occurs. Instead:
  - Escape the area if possible.
  - Seek shelter away from the threat.
  - Contact local authorities once it is safe to do so.
  - Check in with the embassy or consulate to confirm one’s safety and receive further guidance after the incident.

Risks at Border Crossings

- Confirm that no conflict is ongoing and review any Consular Travel Warnings or Safety Bulletins for the route when crossing borders by road.
- Avoid contested international borders: contested borders can be extremely dangerous to cross due to armed conflict or inadequate security.
- Limit travel to official highways, avoiding rural or unmarked roads: even in areas where hostilities have ceased, borders may remain hazardous due to unexploded ordnance or landmines.
- Be prepared to stop at checkpoints and present all legally required documents.
- Verify the validity of entry and exit stamps for both countries: unrecognized stamps may result in denial of entry.
- Always confirm that the crossing is open before attempting to proceed: border crossings may close without notice.

Transportation-Related Crime Risks

Risk for Foreign Travelers in Transit

- Be aware of the crime threat level in each destination: criminals may specifically target foreigners or those who appear to be tourists.
- Exercise caution at night and in areas with poor public services: risks often increase at night or in areas with poor public services.
- Women travelers should travel with a companion and avoid traveling alone at night: travel may be especially dangerous for women travelers in certain regions.
- Women travelers should confirm whether self-defense items are legal in their destination country: regulations vary widely and penalties can be severe.

The following common crimes may affect travelers in many destinations.

Carjacking and Vehicle Theft

- Do not resist if targeted for carjacking and vehicle theft: both are common in certain regions.
- Comply with demands but try to remember details about the attackers and the location.
- Immediately report the incident to local authorities and file a police report.
- Provide documentation to insurers if eligible.

Smash-and-Grab and Snatch-and-Grab Theft

- Keep doors locked (when occupied or parked), bags and valuables concealed, and windows closed (or opened only slightly): smash-and-grab theft often occurs when vehicles are stopped in traffic or left unattended.
- Maintain situational awareness, attempt to move away if targeted, and drive to a well-lit area or police station if possible: snatch-and-grab theft is common in cities and may involve criminals on motorcycles weaving between vehicles.

Fraudulent Stops

- Insist on a paper ticket or request to proceed to the nearest police station to pay rather than paying cash on the spot if a traffic stop seems suspicious: in some countries, criminals impersonate law enforcement and demand immediate payment during fraudulent traffic stops.
- Do not stop for persons who appear to stage a traffic collision or indicate an issue with a vehicle: armed criminals use various ruses to get motorists to stop and exit their vehicle. Report the incident to the police.
- Stop to fix any flat tires at a well-lit, populated location (e.g., a fuel station) and avoid accepting assistance from unknown persons.

Pickpocketing and Public-Transit Theft

- Keep belongings secure in zipped or buttoned pockets or in a bag worn on the front of the body: pickpocketing is a frequent risk on public transportation and in crowded areas.
- Be alert to jostling and bumping: criminals often work in pairs, with one distracting while another steals bags or valuables.

Vehicle Rental Scams

- Be alert to potential scams when renting vehicles in foreign countries.
- Verify the authenticity of any site before booking (certificates, contact details, official channels should match): fraudulent websites mimic legitimate rental companies.
- Make payment by credit card whenever possible, rather than debit card, eCheck, or wire transfer: credit cards typically offer stronger fraud protection.
- Inspect and document the rental vehicle’s condition before leaving with it: travelers may otherwise be charged for preexisting damage. Some companies may intentionally rent defective vehicles and later blame foreign customers when breakdowns occur.
- Address disputes directly with the company but be prepared to involve the police if necessary.
- Avoid renting leisure vehicles (e.g., jet skis, snowmobiles, ATVs) from companies of questionable integrity: in regions where corruption is widespread, authorities may side with rental companies or refuse to file reports.

Maritime Piracy

- Be familiar with kidnapping safety and security recommendations before travel: pirates often kidnap travelers for ransom.
- Use only officially recognized docking and berthing facilities and exercise caution when boarding watercraft in regions where maritime piracy is a risk.

Protests, Strikes, and Civil Disturbances

Transportation Strikes

- Monitor local news and advisories: transportation strikes are common in many parts of the world and result in lengthy delays or cancellations of public transit, including aviation.
- Make plans that work around the strike: strikes are often announced in advance if labor demands go unmet, making them easier to plan around.

- Allow extra time for travel during strike periods.

Protests and Demonstrations

- Monitor local news and advisories: protests unrelated to transportation strikes may also disrupt travel, especially when demonstrators block major roads or highways.
- Do not attempt to pass through or remain near protest sites.
- Leave the area immediately if a demonstration occurs unexpectedly: demonstrations have the potential to turn violent or deadly.
- Do not join or participate in demonstrations in another country: doing so can result in detention, deportation, or other legal consequences.

Curfews and Restrictions

- Comply with curfews imposed by governments during periods of heightened tension or national emergency: violations can result in strict penalties, including imprisonment or deportation.
- Confirm local regulations daily during periods of unrest and plan all movements accordingly.

Conclusion

Transportation choices play a central role in travel safety. Reduce risks and move safely and confidently in unfamiliar environments on land, in the air, and at sea by using the following rules:

- Research options in advance.
- Use reputable providers.
- Follow local laws.
- Remain alert.
- Plan for disruptions.
- Adapt to local conditions.

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