

MPM

Transportation and Trips

Strong Plan Critical to Church Trips

As society became increasingly globalized, travelers worldwide felt evermore at home when venturing abroad. **We did, that is, until September 11, 2001.**

Some things have not changed in today's international airports and cities: we can still hear countless languages spoken simultaneously, purchase the same goods that we enjoy at home, and in many countries, communicate readily with the public.

But our comfort level has stopped rising and our trips abroad now must be more carefully planned. To a significant extent, our spirit of adventure is tempered by common sense security practices and important safety planning.

The following tips are intended to help travelers address many basic concerns; however, every situation must be evaluated based on current conditions and on your specific travel plans.

PLANNING TIPS – WHAT TO DO

Planning Your Trip

Become familiar with the countries to which, and through which, you will travel.

The following websites offer information on practically every country.

<http://travel.state.gov>

★ **The U.S. Department of State** displays travel warnings and provides consular information sheets at this site. E-mail versions of travel safety information sheets may be available. Obtain recorded information by calling 202-647-5225.

Do not enter certain countries with printouts of this information. Some officials object strongly to literature that is critical of their practices or systems.

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>

★ **The Centers for Disease Control's** website offers information on disease outbreaks, vaccinations, safe food and water, traveling with children and special needs travelers. Reference materials are also available from the CDC at this site.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk>

★ **The U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office** posts warnings similar to those provided by the U.S. Department of State, but may offer more in-depth information on travel to British Commonwealth countries or former British colonies. Additionally, this site may display more candid advice about countries where the U.S. currently has political interests or conflicts.

Before You Travel

Call the PACT Service Center at 877-UMC-PACT (877-862-7228) and ask for the threat ratings for countries you plan on traveling to and through.

Prior to each long-distance trip, prepare to leave behind an "emergency file" with information that might be needed in any emergency, such as a kidnapping. Information might include:

- ★ A current detailed itinerary
- ★ A photocopy of passport and vaccination certificate
- ★ Blood type and Rh factor
- ★ Eyeglass prescription

Ministry Protection Memo

“MPM” is a series on various topics relative to Church and safety.

Send your comments and interests to PACT's Director of Ministry Protection, at umcpact@ajg.com.

PACT Service Center

Hours of Operation
8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CST

Contact Information

Toll-Free: 1-877-UMC-PACT

1-877-862-7228

Fax: 1-866-221-4858

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- ★ The name of your doctor and dentist
- ★ A list of travelers' check numbers
- ★ Copies of bank deposit slips
- ★ Copies of insurance policies
- ★ A copy of your will
- ★ A note regarding any financial matters that should be attended to in case of a prolonged absence

- ★ Power of attorney for spouse or relative

Also keep a Personal Profile up to date and on file with your HR Department. Include:

- ★ Color photograph
- ★ Height, weight, eye and hair color, scars
- ★ Handwriting samples
- ★ Fingerprints
- ★ Voice samples
- ★ Description of any medical problems

“Proof of Life” questions, to which only your spouse or close colleague know the answer, such as the nickname of Great Aunt Alice.

- ★ **Keeping in touch:** Rather than friends and family calling you when abroad, it may be best for you to call them instead (use a calling card, and dial so others cannot see). Allow several windows of time for possible calls, since in some countries telephones are not reliable or readily available. But do prearrange periodic calls to your spouse or a colleague that, if not received, would signal trouble. Also consider web-based e-mail. Many hotels have made Internet access available at reasonable prices.

Compile a list of phone numbers:

U. S. State Dept 24 hrs 202-647-5225
 FBI Headquarters 24 hrs 202-324-3000
 U. S. Embassy info 24 hrs 202-501-4444

- ★ **Plot your course:** Purchase or create detailed current maps of your destination, and have them handy when you arrive. Before traveling, remember to identify important locations, available modes of transportation and any problematic areas that you may need to travel through. Map out your route ahead of time, starting at the airport if renting a car, or

thoroughly investigate the rail and bus systems if you plan to rely upon public transport. The popular computer-mapping programs currently available for free on the Internet can be very useful as long as their information is up to date.

- ★ **Passport preparation:** After making sure that your passport is valid, signed and complete with updated emergency information, make two photocopies of the identification page displaying your picture and other important details. Leave one copy in your “emergency file,” and bring the second copy along with you, to store in a different location from your passport. This will be a great asset in the event your passport is lost or stolen. You should do the same with your driver's license and credit cards and with your visa if your destination country requires one.

- ★ **Keep your identity and title safe:** Your job stature or title may put you at risk when traveling abroad. Register yourself as Mr., Mrs., or Ms., not as Dr., Rev. or Bishop, when making arrangements for travel, car rental, lodging or appointments with people you do not know. Similarly, do not include titles, organizations, or any other data on luggage tags, and make sure that the tags have covers so that strangers cannot glance at your luggage and access personal information. If you have upgraded to First Class or Business Class, remove the airline tags as soon as possible after claiming your luggage.

- ★ **What to pack:** Plan to bring only the things that you absolutely need for your trip. Consider leaving all valuable or flashy jewelry at home, and do not bring multiple credit cards, excessive amounts of traveler's checks, unnecessary electronics and brand-name clothing items. But you may find many uses for a small flashlight.

When traveling to a country that censors literature, political nonfiction books or even romantic novels may be considered contraband. Also keep in mind that many customs agents will not allow you to bring fresh fruits and vegetables or plants into their countries. A trained customs dog may even be able to pick up the scent

of an apple carried in your pocket several hours earlier.

- ★ **Medical preparations:** Consult the CDC website and your doctor prior to traveling, and ask about any required or suggested inoculations, the quality of medical care available at your destination and local regulations regarding prescription drugs. If you use prescription medication, make sure that you have an adequate supply to last you through the trip, and keep the medication in its original container. Keep your medication with you in your carry-on luggage in the event you are delayed or your luggage is lost. Ask your doctor to write a refill prescription, both on a standard prescription blank and on letterhead, in case you lose your medicine. See the next page for comments about checking with your medical insurer.

- ★ **Vision care:** If you wear glasses or contact lenses, consider bringing along an extra pair. Additionally, contact-lens wearers should pack extra solution and other necessary supplies, as these may be difficult to obtain in a foreign country. In addition, consider keeping a copy of your vision prescription among your valuable papers.

- ★ **Rules, regulations, and customs:** Research the local laws and customs of your destination countries, as you will need to abide by them while visiting. Travelers should be familiar with the rules of the road, if planning to drive when abroad, and should avoid unauthorized money-exchanging agents, even if their alleged “exchange rate” is tempting. Always use caution when bringing prescription and even over-the-counter drugs on an international trip, as certain substances may be more or less controlled than in your home country. For instance, it is illegal to bring many allergy and sinus medicines and inhalers that are widely accepted and commonly used in the U.S., into Japan and travelers attempting to do so may be detained. The U.S. Department of State website is a good source of information when in doubt about what may be considered illegal in a particular country.

★ **Financial safeguards:** Be sure to bring an international phone number for your credit card company in case your card needs to be replaced or reported stolen. Make a note of your credit limit so that you can avoid accidentally exceeding it (a crime in some areas). Keep the serial numbers of your traveler’s checks in your “emergency file,” and another copy with you in a place separate from the checks. Cross the serial numbers off the list as your traveler’s checks are cashed. Note: while traveler’s checks have long been considered the best way to pay abroad, in recent years travelers have preferred the convenience and favorable exchange rate of credit cards and ATM machines (avoid ATMs in hidden or dark areas). Before traveling, investigate exchange rates, credit card acceptance, and ATM availability in your destination country, and as always, guard your account and ID numbers from view.

★ **Insurance coverage:** Domestic general liability and automobile insurance may provide little or no coverage outside the territory defined in your policies. Review them with your Conference Administrator or call the PACT Service Center at 877-UMC-PACT (877-862-7228) before leaving the country.

Health insurance policies should also be reviewed before you travel. If they provide insurance while you are in other countries, what telephone number should the health care provider use to verify coverage?

WHILE YOU ARE ABROAD

Safety and Health Tips

Don’t tell your life story to strangers:

The common bond of traveling sometimes prompts people to open up more to a seatmate than they would to an ordinary stranger. Avoid the airplane, train and bus “tell all” syndrome, and keep in mind that even a seemingly harmless fellow traveler might have inappropriate or even dangerous intentions. To avoid difficult social situations while in transit, consider bringing some sort of non-political reading material to help occupy your trip, thus relieving you of the obligation to chat for extended periods of time.

Hydration and exercise: Drink plenty of water while flying long distances, and avoid caffeine and alcohol. Also, be sure to flex your calves frequently, avoid sitting with your legs crossed for long periods of time, and dress in non-constricting clothes. A dangerous blood-clotting condition commonly referred to as “Economy Class Syndrome” is a hazard of overseas or other long-distance flights, and experts agree that moving around the cabin can reduce a traveler’s risk. Some airlines show in-transit exercise videos or encourage movement and stretching, but you should not rely upon the airline’s prompting when your circulation is at stake.

Upon arrival: *Reject all offers from those who claim they can get you into or out of the country quicker.* Keep close personal control of your documents and luggage, and likewise, do not accept or agree to watch any packages from strangers. Be very suspicious of aggressive “taxi drivers” or “luggage-carriers” who often target newly arrived travelers. In high-risk countries, avoid taxis altogether. Arrange ahead of time to be met by a hotel van or other transportation of your choosing, or use bus or rail transportation. In lower risk countries, look for a legitimate taxi stand, and if at all possible carry your own bags, or rent a luggage cart so that you can transport them on your own.

Assistance from your embassy: If you are staying in a medium to high-risk country, you should register with your embassy in that country as soon as possible after arriving. Additionally, if you plan to stay longer than two weeks in any foreign country it is a good idea to register with the embassy. Registration may be done over the phone or in person, and if your travel plans change do not forget to notify this important government office of your whereabouts.

Be streetwise: Many of the street-smart practices we use every day at home can be valuable in an international setting. Be cautious in crowded areas; avoid dark alleys or poorly lit shortcuts; keep a low profile while still maintaining an appearance of confidence; and beware of pickpockets, purse-snatchers, and con artists. Thieves often have an accomplice (or several), who



may attempt to distract you. Groups of teenagers and even children sometimes function as pickpocket teams, and passing bicyclists or motorists have been known to grab valuables from pedestrians, and from drivers with open windows. For increased safety, wear the strap of your bag or purse across your chest with the bag facing you, and whenever possible, but especially at night, try to walk with a friend, colleague, or traveling partner.

Language: Nationals in your host country appreciate attempts to use their language, such as a simple greeting, a “please,” or a “thank you.” Even if you are not a fluent or confident speaker, familiarity with your host language will be a big help for things as basic as ordering off a menu and reading street signs. It is also important to know at least a few phrases of the local language in case you need to ask for emergency assistance or verbally refuse the advances of a stranger.

Transportation Safety: The U.S. Department of State’s Consular Information website can give you specific, up-to-date details on recent incidents and crimes involving transportation in the country you are visiting, including a rating of the roads and public transport facilities. In general, it is best to follow the guidelines below:

★ **Automobiles:** When renting a car abroad, select a common make and model, and specifically ask the company for a vehicle that will blend in with

others: no advertisement stickers, rental car license plates, or other indicators that criminals may notice. Inspect the vehicle thoroughly and alert rental personnel to any damage. Make reservations ahead of time with a well-known company, while in the USA if possible. Review the rules of the road beforehand, and find out whether an international driver's license is necessary. Keep the car doors locked and seat belts on, as you would at home, and do not drive with windows open. In hot climates, try to get a car with air conditioning, as this will eliminate the need to roll windows down and give thieves access. Always park in a well-lit and secure area, and never leave valuables in the car, especially not in clear view. When driving your own car to Mexico, you must purchase Mexican auto insurance, which will be made available to you inexpensively at the border. And needless to say, do not drink and drive under any circumstances.

- ★ **Taxis:** Avoid taxis in high-risk countries if possible. When taking a cab, look for established taxi stands and vehicles that have clear identification markings. Do not allow alleged taxi drivers to “cut you a deal” and you ride in their unmarked cars. The risk involved is not worth any savings they might promise. Familiarize yourself with taxi etiquette in the country you are visiting; in some countries the passenger and driver must decide on a price beforehand, and knowing the going rate for cab travel (and any legitimate extra fees that a driver may ask for, such as a charge for baggage) may help prevent you from being overcharged.
- ★ **Public Transportation:** It is important to investigate your destination's current public transportation system and decide if it can safely meet your transit needs. When taking the bus or train, keep a close watch over your valuables, and do not store luggage in areas that are out of your sight. In a subway, look for a car that is not packed with riders, but also not empty, and do not let the motion of the train put you to sleep, even for a minute. If your trip includes travel on an overnight train, and a locking compartment is not available, stay awake if at all possible, or arrange to sleep in shifts with your traveling partners. As in

any situation abroad or at home, do not accept food or drink from strangers, as criminals employ various drugging tactics to make travelers vulnerable. Alert the authorities immediately if you feel threatened, and make a mental note of intercoms and “panic buttons” in your rail car as you enter.

Hotel Safety: When arranging for lodgings, ask your travel agent for a place that is likely to adhere to high standards with respect to your safety. A low price is a bargain only if you do not have to compromise safety and security.

The age of the building, the floor you are staying on, and the fire and security features available are all important factors when making a decision. Modern buildings are more likely to include sprinkler systems and smoke detectors. Fire department ladders seldom reach above the seventh floor, and the fifth floor might be closer to the norm in some countries.

However, if offered a ground or first-floor room, ask to be moved upstairs, as street-level lodgings are the most susceptible to break-ins. While hotels abroad range widely—from five-star accommodations to budget travel lodges—the following safety tips may come in handy regardless of the facility's amenities:

- ★ Upon arriving at your hotel, thoroughly review the fire-safety map and other instructions in your room, and locate the nearest fire escape. Check for a working smoke detector, and if none is present, request another room. In the event of a fire evacuation, remember to bring your key with you rather than leaving it behind.
- ★ Keep the door to your hotel room locked at all times, and consider bringing a rubber stopper to wedge under the door in case there is no way to secure the room from the inside (chain locks and dead bolts are not always standard in foreign hotels).
- ★ Do not leave valuables in your room while you are out. Either carry them on your person (cash or a passport may be carried in a money belt around your waist or in a hidden neck-strap pouch) or stow them in the hotel safe, rather than in the

small safe in your room.

- ★ If the elevator arrives and there is a suspicious-looking person inside, wait for the next elevator. Likewise, if a suspicious character gets on the elevator while you are riding, exit immediately.
- ★ Never open the hotel door for anyone who is not expected, including hotel staff. When meeting friends or colleagues at the hotel, arrange to see them in the lobby rather than in your personal room.
- ★ If attending a conference or convention in a hotel or other public place, make sure to remove your nametag or credentials when you leave the event, keeping your identity and title private.
- ★ Be sensitive to the fact that Friday is the weekly day of prayer in Islamic countries. Streets may be very busy when people leave the mosques in the early afternoon.

BON VOYAGE!



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