

WHY ALL AUSTRALIANS SHOULD TAKE OUT TRAVEL INSURANCE BEFORE GOING OVERSEAS

For most Australians overseas travel is a wonderful experience. Unfortunately, however, every day consular officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade at home and overseas deal with human tragedies involving the death, injury or hospitalisation of Australians abroad. Each year the department handles over 20,000 cases involving Australians in difficulty overseas. This includes over 700 hospitalisations, 600 deaths and 100 evacuations of Australians to another location for medical purposes.

In cases where victims are not covered by travel insurance, such personal tragedies are further compounded by a long-term financial burden. Hospitalisation, medical evacuations, or even the return of the deceased's remains to Australia, can be very expensive. Daily hospitalisation costs in Southeast Asia regularly exceed \$800; return of remains from Europe in excess of \$10,000. The cost of medical evacuations from the United States regularly range from \$75,000 to \$95,000, and sometimes up to \$300,000. The department has handled medical evacuations from nearby Bali in which costs have exceeded \$60,000.

Unfortunately, not all of these cases involved travellers covered by travel insurance. Travellers who are not covered by insurance are personally liable for covering incurred medical and associated costs. As a result, we have known instances where families have been forced to sell off assets, including their superannuation or family homes, to bring loved ones back to Australia for treatment.

Despite these stark statistics, it is not the department's intention to discourage Australians from travelling, which in almost all cases is a very positive experience. Only 0.6% of Australians travelling overseas encounter difficulty each year.

Instead, one of our key messages to Australian travellers is that there are things you can do to help reduce the likelihood of becoming one of the more unhappy consular statistics. With accidents or illness often unavoidable, proper travel insurance is very important in this context. Of course, the all-too-common occurrence of theft and loss of personal belongings is also something all Australian travellers should insure against. Each year the department handles over 16,000 cases involving the welfare of Australians who have suffered illness, theft, robbery or assault.

In choosing a policy, we would note some insurance policies will not always cover claims made in those countries to which the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade recommends against travel. For up-to-date travel advice, we recommend travellers consult and monitor our website (www.dfat.gov.au/travel).

