

General FAQ

What's the best way to deal with money matters while traveling?

Here are a few pointers:

- Do not carry large quantities of cash.
- In most major cities in the U.S. and abroad, you can use your ATM card just as you do at home.
- Carry only the debit and credit cards you will use on your trip
- Bring a small amount of local currency with you in case exchanges are closed when you arrive.
- For security, enter the customer service 800 #'s off your credit cards into your cell phone, if you are carrying your phone with you on your trip.

Will I be able to use my ATM card when I travel abroad? If your ATM card is linked to the Plus® or Cirrus® systems, you can use it to get cash in several dozen countries abroad. Contact MasterCard (1-800-424-7787) and Visa/Plus (1-800-843-7587) for a list of locations worldwide.

The biggest advantage of exchanging money with an ATM card is that all cash withdrawals are exchanged on the interbank exchange rate. Check with your bank before using an ATM card abroad; some banks add higher transaction fees for overseas use.

Many ATMs abroad do not accept PINs longer than four digits. If yours is longer, you may need to change it locally before you leave.

Stay safe. If you do make cash withdrawals, keep them small. If possible, use ATMs within the bank itself, since exterior ATMs are more vulnerable to ATM fraud. Avoid using ATMs at night.

Where can I get foreign currency before I leave on vacation? International airports usually exchange money while you wait, however rates tend to be very high so change only as much as you need. You can order foreign currencies from your bank at home, but it may take a few days if it's not a major currency.

What security precautions should I take in preparation for and during travel abroad? The State Department has an excellent description of travel safety precautions. Please see <http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety> for more information.

Here are a few highlights:

- Before you travel abroad, register with the Embassy or Consulate. This can be done online. You need to provide your itinerary, passport information and the name, address and phone number of an emergency contact.
- Use dead bolts and other locks when you are in your hotel room or cruise cabin, and never leave room or cabin keys lying about when you are outside.
- Put extra cash, airline tickets, keys and valuables in your room safe, the hotels safe deposit boxes or in your cruise ship's deposit boxes. Leave your expensive jewelry and watches at home.
- When you head out to explore on your own, follow the advice of cruise personnel, tour guides or hotel staff when they tell you places to avoid and precautions to take while driving or walking.
- If you make ATM withdrawals, keep them small. If possible, use ATMs within the bank itself, since exterior ATMs are more vulnerable to ATM fraud. Avoid using ATMs at night.
- Finally, consider purchasing travel insurance that covers interrupted travel, trip cancellation and medical emergencies.

Prepare for a safe trip – Hurricane season can affect travel in Atlantic, Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. U.S. travelers considering travel to storm-prone regions during hurricane season should carefully consider the potential dangers and inconveniences associated with their travel before finalizing plans. Americans who do choose to travel during the hurricane season should monitor local radio and other sources of information, such as the National Hurricane Center, to stay aware of any weather developments in the area.

What type of insurance do I need? Trip cancellation/interruption coverage can be invaluable if you have to cancel your vacation. Before your trip, you'll be given a list of accepted reasons for canceling. But your coverage doesn't allow you to change your plans on a whim — or because you have jitters about world tensions.

Am I already covered? Many travelers are protected for certain contingencies under their medical, auto or homeowner policies or through their charge-card issuer. However, some coverage may not extend outside the U.S., and some policies may include a deductible.

How do I purchase travel insurance? You can buy travel insurance online or by phone. Some of the better-known brands are Access America, CSA, Lloyd's, Travel Guard International, Travel Insured and Travelex. It is always best to purchase your travel insurance protection from a third-party source. Typically, if you purchase travel insurance directly through a travel supplier such as an airline, cruise line, or tour operator, you cannot protect yourself should that travel supplier go bankrupt or become financially insolvent. Have your travel agent, give you a recommendation or handle it for you.

There are five basic categories of travel insurance. They are:

- Trip cancellation
- Travel medical
- Travel major medical
- Emergency medical evacuation
- Accidental Death/Flight Accident

Trip cancellation travel insurance is probably the most familiar form of travel insurance. It protects policyholders should they need to cancel or cut short a trip because of illness, injury, weather, and mechanical difficulties. Some companies have recently added benefits that allow travelers to get their money back if a trip is cancelled or cut short because of business-related scheduling changes, an airline or other travel company goes out of business, and even acts of terrorism.

Travel medical and travel major medical insurance both offer protection should the policyholder become ill or be injured while traveling. This type of travel insurance is frequently overlooked because travelers believe their existing insurance will protect them on the road. This may be true within the U.S. and even Canada; however, most American health insurance policies do not mean much in other nations. Americans traveling internationally may also find it challenging to locate doctors, hospitals and other healthcare facilities and providers they may need should they fall ill abroad. Many travel medical policies also offer foreign language assistance in addition to more traditional medical coverage. Seniors should be aware that Medicare rarely covers healthcare in a foreign country. Pre-existing medical conditions may be excluded by travel medical and travel major medical policies, although waivers may be given covering relatively stable conditions for a set period of time.

Sometimes, the hardest part of getting medical treatment is getting to an appropriate facility, especially if a traveler is in a remote or rural area. Emergency medical evacuation insurance provides coverage for medically necessary evacuations and transportation to medical facilities for treatment.

Why isn't my existing medical insurance enough coverage? Check with your primary care insurer but most insurance companies will not cover accidents overseas or out of the area and usually claims will only be met up to a stated limit. Travel insurance will cover balances up to a much higher amount. In addition you will receive cover for travel costs, accommodations and assistance.