

# Tips on how to handle an emergency abroad

An overseas trip allows you to experience new and exciting things in a different part of the world. Often, during the preparation stage, dealing with an emergency abroad is the last thing you think about, but an unplanned or unforeseen crisis can be a harsh reality.



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Challenges you may be exposed to while travelling abroad could be: losing your passport or other important documents, illness, an accident, becoming the victim of crime, or even an a natural disaster, all of which are unplanned.

Charlotte Quenet-Meintjes, head of Workaway International South Africa, explained that it is important to be able to handle a crisis, especially while in another country. "Before embarking on your journey, it is essential that you prepare yourself as best you can for anything that could happen while you are miles away from home. Copies of important documents and travel and medical insurance are just a few things I encourage all of our South African recruits to be prepared with before they embark on their trip to the US," she said.

## Emergency travel pack

Quenet-Meintjes stressed the importance of an emergency travel pack, which is a vital component when planning a trip. "There are no fixed items that need to be included in this pack, but the most important ones are definitely medical and personal documentation," she advised.

A few other items that should be included in this pack are:

- Multiple copies of your passport and/or visa;
- A copy of your insurance information;
- A copy of area maps of your destination and/or other places you may visit;
- Multiple copies of your electronic air ticket, with confirmation and ticket numbers highlighted;
- Special medical needs treatment, if applicable (a medical bracelet is recommended);
- Copy of your home country's driver's licence and identification document;

- Cellphone with a SIM card that will work overseas and sufficient airtime;
- ATM/credit card (e.g. Visa or Mastercard) as well as US currency; and
- Emergency/first aid kit.

Apart from the emergency travel pack items that should accompany you on your trip, Quenet-Meintjes also shares some essential tips for handling an emergency abroad.

## **Register online**

Register on ROSA (Registration of South Africans Abroad) - ROSA is a platform that allows travellers to register online so that their information is accessible to the relevant entities, such as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, in the case of an emergency. "In the event of a crisis, it is vital that your information is easily accessible in order to ensure a quick response and/or assistance," said Quenet-Meintjes. Registration is a free and this service is explicitly available to South African citizens who are travelling, living or working abroad.

## **Lost/stolen goods**

Dealing with lost/stolen goods - Travelling overseas doesn't mean your belongings are safer than they are at home, so extra care should be given to looking after your possessions, especially important documents. "The first thing you need to do if your passport is lost or stolen while you are abroad is report the loss/theft immediately to the local police station," advised Quenet-Meintjes. "Take a copy of the police report to the nearest South African Embassy, where you will then be able to apply for a temporary passport/emergency travel document," she said.

## **Medical emergency**

How to handle a medical emergency - "This is when your medical insurance will be greatly beneficial," said Quenet-Meintjes. In the event of a sudden injury or assault, you should try to get help from the nearest location and to call an emergency services number immediately. If you are suffering from a trauma injury, you should try to get to any clinic or hospital as soon as possible in order to stabilise your condition. "Calling your travel insurer, country's embassy or consulate to inquire which hospital the embassy suggests using is recommended," she added.

## **Criminal activity**

Dealing with crime - Always report a crime to the local police department, even if you don't think they will take action, as the police report is needed for any insurance claims. "While the number one rule is to avoid being involved in any sort of crime or wrongdoing as far as possible, should you find yourself in this situation, you need to report it immediately," said Quenet-Meintjes.

Listen to the locals - Being a foreigner in an unfamiliar location, you may be susceptible to strange or uncomfortable scenarios so it is important to take advice from those who are more accustomed to it. "If you happen to find yourself in a 'worst case scenario' it is best to follow the advice of local authorities or to seek advice from other trusted local individuals as they will have more insight into a solution to your predicament," said Quenet-Meintjes.