

Risky business

With security alerts on the rise, frequent flyers need to be savvy about managing trips in the wake of disruption, says **Jenny Southan**

While the chances of being caught up in a terrorist attack are low, the ripple effect from a security incident or alert may well disrupt your travel plans.

Whether a city is on lockdown because of a manhunt (think of Brussels at the end of last year), or an airport has been evacuated after a bomb threat (as happened at Gatwick in November), an itinerary may be hamstrung by the cancellation of flights, the closure of borders, or fears for your safety.

In the days following the mass shooting in Paris four months ago, trips there from Western and Eastern Europe dropped by as much as 50 per cent compared with the previous week, according to data from travel marketing platform Sojern. It took more than seven days for people to regain confidence. Some 22 million people visited Paris in 2014, so an event like this can have devastating implications, not only for those caught up in it, but also for businesses.

At such times, it can be difficult to balance professionalism and self-preservation, and decisions about whether to try to "carry on as normal" can be tricky to make. For the business traveller, the mindset tends to lean towards the latter, which means ongoing risk assessments are essential to inform decision-making and contingency planning. Rob Walker, head of information and analysis at International SOS and





Control Risks (ISCR), says: "If there's an election that you think could be contentious, for example, we'll often advise managers to be more flexible in their ticketing and accommodation in the run-up. Rather than immediately defer travel, they need to educate individuals to be at a higher level of readiness."

Unlike holidaymakers, who would likely cancel a trip to an affected destination, business people may be concerned that this may lose them an important deal. David Holley, founder and director of HP Risk Management, says: "If you've got business there and it's important, I wouldn't say don't go. Make your travel plans more robust. Take the most secure ways of getting there and getting out, travel covertly, don't necessarily stay in Western hotels, have good connections locally, and stay there for less time."

He adds: "Call the people you're going to have to meet and ask if not coming will really affect the contract. If it doesn't, travel a week or two later."

HIGH PRIORITY

According to travel management company Carlson Wagonlit's *Travel Trends, Program Priorities 2016* report, 80 per cent of travel managers are expecting safety and security to have a "high or very high"

impact on their travel programmes this year. Last year, research company Collinson Group found that in the first half of 2015 there was a 52 per cent increase (2.5 million versus 1.6 million) in the number of trips UK business travellers made to "high-risk" destinations such as Tunisia, Egypt and Israel. (These are defined as places that have experienced "level three" security incidents, such as terrorist attacks and attempted coups.) Previously "safe" destinations that experienced level-three incidents in 2015 include

Denmark, France and the US.

In spite of all this, 2016 research by Collinson Group found that only 38 per cent of HR professionals said their company conducted safety assessments before business travel to high-risk areas, while less than half (44 per cent) issued company guidelines for travel.

A recent study by Deloitte found that the global hotel industry was becoming "more resilient to shocks from terrorism", with occupancy rates recovering far quicker. Randall Gordon-Duff, head of product, corporate travel, at Collinson Group, says: "People like

We are more likely to experience disruption caused by bad weather

the 30-something manager who grew up on foreign holidays in Ecuador are more adventurous and more entrepreneurial. They're less worried about getting out to some of these places but sometimes get into more scrapes."

SMART THINKING

The reality, Holley says, is that we are more likely to experience disruption to our travel plans as a consequence of bad weather than terrorism. "I think modifying your travel into America and Europe, just for the very remote chance of an attack, is unnecessary," he says. "I don't see the point in booking a flexible flight just in case Gatwick closes for a day because of a terrorist threat."

Updating colleagues and family on your whereabouts is vital, however. Carlson Wagonlit's new CWT To Go app allows the traveller to upload their itineraries so that they can be tracked. "We have just added a travel arranger function so that the travel manager can see all their travellers' trips in real time," says Carinne Saulet, vice-president of global product management, global marketing. "Families can also download the app and log in to see where their loved ones are." ▶

CASE STUDY: THE HIGHER-RISK TRAVELLER

ANDREW COLLINGWOOD (pictured) is practice lead, governance, security and justice, for an international development organisation in Pakistan. He works with clients including the UK government and the EU and travels frequently across the Middle East.

"On November 7, 2015, I landed in Cairo a week after the [Russian A321 Kogalymavia] plane exploded soon after taking off from Sharm el-Sheikh. With a consular crisis under way in Egypt, I had to balance the decision [before departure] of whether to fly there or not, knowing that our client, the UK government, had a crisis to deal with.

"Keeping an eye on travel advice and the media gets you so far, but I was travelling [to Egypt] to launch a project, with meetings and calls arranged for the first week. This meant I was relying on people to be available to meet me, and that is difficult to judge when you are not in



the country and your client is busy managing a crisis. In this case, I chose to travel but left the option open on the length of stay. It turned out to be the right decision and I extended my visit by a week to take meetings.

"On leaving Egypt, I was more anxious than usual. With all the additional security at Cairo airport, all the media reporting and the heightened perception of threat, I found myself looking at people differently. To help overcome this, I talked to people as much as possible. It's easy to obsess

about something you see and get suspicious. By talking to people, you quickly find that people haven't changed since you last got on a plane – it's your perception that has. That helped a great deal.

"It's rare I feel unsafe. But I sometimes forget that I am used to being in potentially unsafe environments. I have learnt that explaining more about the countries I work in and the work that I do helps people to appreciate that I am safer than people might believe. Travelling a lot means sometimes people are not sure where exactly you are. In December, there was a firebombing at a club in downtown Cairo. I'd left Cairo the day before but had several messages asking if I was okay. It reminded me that keeping those close to you updated on where you are is easily neglected.

"I was also in Islamabad during the recent earthquake. I was upstairs in my office and felt the initial tremor. When that turned into a sustained rumble, I was genuinely scared as I had no idea if the building was about to fall on top of me. We quickly evacuated and, thankfully, damage was limited. I used the Facebook Locator for the first time – a useful way of letting friends and family know that I was safe.

"Higher-risk destinations can bring higher levels of stress with them. Being able to adapt and change plans is really important. You can't be rigid, so experience of having to completely rethink an approach is important. It can be emotionally draining.

"A lot of my job is about responding to people's issues and worries to get the best result. It can be lonely. The regular use of things like Whatsapp and Skype mean you can be in constant touch with people. It really makes a difference."

American Express Global Business Travel has revamped its tracking app, Expert Care, enabling traveller managers to monitor employees' proximity to potential disruption and to communicate with them directly. It also features real-time flight status. Other apps with similar services include G4S Travel Aware, Safature and Amadeus Mobile Messenger.

One concern is that a communication blackout could occur. In his new book, *Looking for Lemons*, crisis management expert Lloyd Figgins says: "Mobile phone networks are likely to be shut down or overwhelmed soon after an attack, so you may not be able to communicate with the outside world. I was in Moscow during the 2010 Metro bombings and just managed to send a text to my client to say the team was safe so that their next of kin could be informed. Minutes after, the mobile network crashed. It was two days before proper service was re-established."

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Richard Lovell-Knight, director of global operations, risk and information services for Pilgrims Group, says: "Prepare for the expected and – within reason – the unexpected." One contributor to our online forum (businesstraveller.com/discussion), Alsacienne, says: "Since the New Year's Eve fire



[at the Address Downtown hotel] in Dubai, I have taken good advice from *Business Traveller* readers and checked exit routes from my hotel bedroom, and prepared shoes, coat, documents and a small LED torch to be close at hand."

If you do find yourself in the midst of an incident, call your risk management company or TMC for advice. Walker from ISCR says: "It's critical to be able to get access to the right information so that you can make an informed decision about what you want to do. If you don't have the advantages of our services, then obviously you've got to start finding out that information from scratch, which is much harder." Monitor social media, contact the embassy or speak to hotel staff, for example.

Walker adds that we should also anticipate the possibility of false alarms, but at the same time trust our instincts: "People's gut reactions are often a very good indicator. Clearly, context is really important because suddenly not seeing lots of people on the streets can be unnerving, for example. But if that's because there's a cultural tradition that mandates people be indoors at a particular time of day, then obviously there's nothing sinister behind it." ■

'Prepare for the expected and – within reason – the unexpected'

10 WAYS TO MINIMISE DISRUPTION

<p>Don't panic</p> <p>Keep emergency phone numbers to hand</p> <p>Check what your insurance covers</p> <p>Have a plan B but stick to your agenda if you can</p> <p>Use travel security apps</p> <p>Carry back-ups of important documents</p>	<p>Keep third parties abreast of your plans and whereabouts</p> <p>Monitor the news, social media and government travel advice</p> <p>Travel light, carry your passport and a spare credit card</p> <p>Carry a small portable battery for your phone</p>
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9 Cheong Tat Road, Hong Kong International Airport, Chek Lap Kok, Hong Kong.
Tel: (852) 2286 8888 Fax: (852) 2286 8686 Email: info@airport.regalhotel.com
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