

Sound advice for safe travel

What preparations should companies make to cut down on the risks linked with business travel? **Rob Walker**, of International SOS and Control Risks, answers important questions on how to offer the best support to staff whose work takes them abroad.

The best way to support employees who travel for business purposes, as well as to enable business growth and deliver on duty of care, is to understand the risks at destinations, and to take appropriate precautions. These include assessing exposure to risks, monitoring events in the region, and providing pre-travel training. Pre-trip risk assessment, education and preparation can markedly reduce the likelihood of an incident disrupting travel.

A recent Ipsos Global Advisor study questions participants about their particular concerns and the preparations they made when travelling abroad.

The report says eight in 10 travellers have felt their personal safety could be threatened when abroad. However, findings showed that fewer than four in 10 travellers research crime at destination, neighbourhoods to avoid, safety standards of public transport or security features of their accommodation before they travel.

The study also reported that while 71% of senior executive travellers have experienced a medical problem abroad, only 15% of them assess adequacy of local healthcare before travelling.

Here are answers to some of the questions to help prepare staff who travel.

What is good practice for staff travelling for work purposes

Our advice to the organisation with travelling employees is provide pre-trip medical checks, educate and train employees on travel safety, understand the medical and security risks at destination and plan accordingly with proper risk assessment.

For travellers, our advice is to research your destination, plan accordingly and be



aware of your surroundings. Arrange appropriate transportation at destination – research ahead of time whether public transport options are safe, whether a car and driver is recommended, for example.

It is always best to speak with a travel security specialist should you have particular concerns about a destination so that he or she can provide your member of staff with personalised advice based on the risk and travel profile.

Have considerations changed?

The increase in business travel means that more employees are facing unfamiliar environments and with uncertainty comes inevitable risk.

Over the past 30 years the world has changed dramatically. Business travellers have been caught in all types of situations – tsunamis, earthquakes, civil unrests, epidemics such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (more commonly known as SARS), and the Ebola outbreak.

The risk that staff may face while travelling for work purposes is in large part what led to the emergence of an organisation’s duty of care to their employees.

Travellers expect their employer to support them in the event of an emergency.

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Are some countries more dangerous than others?

The reality is there are risks everywhere in the world. The level of personal risk a traveller could be exposed to varies according to their personal risk profile, their experience travelling abroad, the activities they will be getting involved in and where they will be going.

The analysis of the country medical versus travel security risk ratings in the International SOS 2016 Travel Risk Map shows risks are not necessarily proportionate. For example, there are 30 countries that have “insignificant” or “low” travel security risk, but “high” or “very high” medical risks.

The important point is that travellers need to educate themselves about the specific risks in the destinations they are visiting. It’s the everyday incidents that can catch people out. The biggest risks to people abroad are the everyday occurrences: petty crime, road accidents, falling ill.

BUSINESS ABROAD... minimising the risk of incidents.

For example, only 23% of people consider road conditions before they travel abroad despite road accidents being one of the most common dangers to travellers.

Is 2016 a more risky year for buying business travel?

Whether it’s a riskier year or not – there are always risks for travellers. What’s important is that those responsible for buying and approving travel understand the risks and their exposure to them at each intended destination. They need to know what’s happening and how that might change, and what to do if an incident occurs that could affect their travellers’ wellbeing and safety.

Our recommendation is for travel managers to know where their travellers are, have access to trusted information and analysis and have actionable advice for their travellers who may be affected by an event.

Is traveller behaviour changing?

The primary trend is an increase in the review and research travellers and companies are instigating before travelling.

People are asking for information from SOS about destinations they would not necessarily have called about previously. For example, we received a significant increase in calls following the Paris attacks regarding travel to Western Europe.

We have also seen an rise in the number of calls asking for advice on appropriate accommodation and hotel recommendations. We are seeing roughly three times the number of calls where people specifically request advice on where to stay.

Regarding daily routines, we encourage all travellers to vary their them so that they make it harder for criminals to target them.

What are the major health risks for business travellers?

Seventy-one per cent of senior executive travellers reported they had experienced medical concerns abroad; however many of the issues reported can be prevented.

A recent Ipsos Global Advisor study lists the most common concerns as: stomach and/or gastrointestinal problems; flu and/or contagious disease; and environment-specific problems such as altitude sickness, air pollution and heat exposure. Insect-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue and yellow fever also scored highly as a concern for senior executive travellers.

What services can organisations provide travelling staff?

Organisations can offer remote medical advice and assistance. Frequently called “telehealth”, this service provides employees with a dedicated number to call round the clock should they have health concerns.

When looking at providers, organisations should conduct due diligence to ensure the



provider is able to support their global travellers. Questions to ask include:

- Are the medical professionals trained in remote medicine?
- Is the provider legally and logistically capable of delivering medical advice and assistance across borders?
- Is patient information securely stored and transmitted?
- Does the telehealth service have a global network of vetted providers should a face-to-face medical consultation or specialist referral be required?
- Does the provider meet international standards for quality management and clinical governance?
- Are there trends in the risk from exposure to infections, for example the Zika virus or Ebola – and in prophylactic vaccinations?

The biggest trend is organisations building pandemic preparedness plans – and there is a much greater emphasis being placed on pre-travel education. This includes providing information about risks at a traveller's destination, as well as requiring travellers to complete elearning about how to reduce their exposure to infectious and insect-borne diseases.

Are firms paying more attention to travel risk management?

After a year of numerous terror incidents, we have seen an increase across the board in interest and requests for products and services related to travel security and risk mitigation. In addition, we have seen traveller behaviour changing.

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How can you reduce the risk of employees becoming victims of terrorism or insurrection?

Be alert, know what to do if near an incident, be able to communicate and expect your company and relatives to be concerned

INTERNATIONAL SOS

International SOS is a global travel and medical security company, caring for clients in 89 countries from more than 700 locations.

The firm provides medical, clinical and security assistance to organisations with international travellers and/or operations. It has more than 10,000 clients, including multinational corporates, governments and NGOs, and serves 83% of the Fortune Global 100 and 61% of the Fortune Global 500. International SOS has 11,000 employees led by 1,200 doctors and 200 security specialists.

The organisation celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2015. Since it was founded, International SOS has played a key role in the aftermath of every major disaster, including the recent Brussels and Paris attacks, the Arab Spring, Bali bombings, the Ebola and SARS pandemics, the Boxing Day tsunami and the earthquakes in Nepal and Haiti.

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS: BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANISATIONS

International SOS provides the following five best practices for global organisations when reviewing their pandemic response plans.

1. Anywhere, anytime

A new virus can spread quickly. It's important for an organisation's pandemic plan to encompass all geographies, not just those where outbreaks have occurred.

2. Fast-moving

Outbreaks can evolve rapidly. Develop a pandemic plan that is responsive and adaptive, so you can quickly and consistently communicate with staff.

3. Severity informs response

Assessing the severity of an outbreak can be a challenge. Media reports and community sentiment can have a significant impact on perception of risk. Develop processes and guidelines to assess severity in your communities, and communicate that information to your employees.

4. Responding to the unknown

There can be confusion and a lack of definitive information about the nature of a new illness. The challenge for health authorities is to communicate the unknowns in a balanced, appropriate and tailored manner, focusing broadly on practical, actionable steps that everyone should take and, where necessary, enacting more severe measures to protect specific, affected populations. An organisation's pandemic plan should further tailor the information based on employees' needs as individuals or small groups, rather than as an entire population.

5. Variable capabilities

Some countries are better prepared to respond to an infectious disease outbreak. Organisations are encouraged to examine the responses to recent outbreaks in the countries where they operate and develop plans that incorporate the global variations.

and want to talk to you immediately post-incident. Choose SMS instead of voice because cellular comms get overwhelmed or reserved for emergency services immediately post-incident. Keep everything in perspective and treat media and social media reporting with caution.

Are firms changing how they categorise risk management?

No matter what the destination, there are always going to be risks for travellers. While high-profile events such as Zika virus and terrorist attacks get a lot of media coverage, road accidents remain one of the most common risks to the business traveller abroad.

It is important that travellers and those responsible for buying and approving travel understand the risks and their exposure to them for the various destinations. They should be informed of what's happening in and around their destination, and what to do in the event an incident occurs that could affect the traveller's wellbeing and safety.

Our recommendations for travel managers are to know where their travellers are, have access to trusted information and analysis, and have actionable advice for their travellers who may be affected by an event.

How can organisations help their staff reduce exposure to risks when travelling?

The 2016 Travel Risk Map (www.travelriskmap.com) is a good start. It displays each country's medical and travel security risk ratings. The result is a comprehensive overview of risks by destination to aid organisations in their travel risk mitigation efforts.

The map offers a comprehensive summary of the different levels of security, and medical and health risks a person who is going to embark on a trip might face around the world. It provides a starting point for examining what those risks are, promoting awareness among employees of the need to research and prepare before the trip.

Best practice includes having an assistance partner who can help you build a

travel risk management programme. Find an assistance partner that has a global network of trusted, vetted providers available to support your travellers should their safety or wellbeing be at risk, whether because of medical or security concerns. This often plays an extremely important part in ensuring that the trip is successful. The network can also serve as an invaluable source of information for those travelling about the real threats on the ground.

Pre-trip preparation is always a best practice, but it is essential for high and extreme risk destinations. Thoroughly mapping out the journey, understanding any associated risks, and then implementing relevant preventive measures reduces exposure to the likelihood of an incident occurring. Equally important is having a solid plan for responding to an incident if one were to occur.

Are there any important developments in the global assistance industry?

There are key developments in how the global industry informs travellers about travel security risks before they travel abroad and when they arrive. These are:

- ability quickly to locate and communicate with travellers during a crisis via traveller tracking solutions;
- improvements to itinerary-based pre-travel advice so that it is more customised to an individual traveller's needs;
- focused alerts during trips that use traveller-initiated "check-in" locations or, where relevant, background GPS data;
- the importance of actionable advice that comes from experts with strong regional and local knowledge;
- focus on traveller education and involvement – preparing the traveller on how to reduce their exposure to risks through pre-travel training courses and information about their destination.

■ Rob Walker is head of information and analysis at International SOS and Control Risks.