



Adventure Travel: Know Before You Go



OVERVIEW

In October, the Department of State added a new section on tourism safety to all of its [country information pages](#). This addition provides information about the tourism infrastructure of each country, and its ability to provide emergency services to foreign visitors. The Department also launched a new [adventure travel information page](#), acknowledging the higher-risk activities increasingly popular with travelers. It is increasingly common for travelers to venture off the beaten path, and to indulge in adventure travel. Accordingly, security managers should consider this new language when briefing their personnel prior to travel, as well as when formulating organizational risk protocols related to travel.

WHY FOCUS ON ADVENTURE TRAVEL?

As more people travel internationally each year, many engage in riskier activities than the traditional sightseeing and shopping itineraries of old. This goes for independent travelers as well as those who take advantage of a business trip, study abroad program, or international research opportunity to go off the beaten track and experience adventure tourism in their free time. Adventure travel includes activities with a greater degree of risk – and often, greater physical exertion – than that posed by typical tourist activities. Examples include mountain biking, water sports, bungee jumping, safaris, and surfing. While the number of [non-natural deaths of U.S. citizens overseas](#) is generally declining, drowning and road accidents continue to be some of the most common causes of death for U.S. citizens abroad. Adventure travel activities like water sports and off-roading may heighten these risks, increasing the importance of improved traveler awareness.

HOW SHOULD I READ THE NEW LANGUAGE?

The new language is supplemental—it does not replace any existing resources. Rather, it complements existing resources such as [Travel Advisories](#), which give standardized levels of travel advice for every destination around the world, and tailored information the State Department gives other types of travelers, such as [cruise ship passengers](#), [students](#), or [travelers with disabilities](#). This new tourism safety information is distinct from Travel Advisories, which the Department already bases on a comprehensive assessment of





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established risk indicators (i.e. crime, terrorism, kidnapping, civil unrest, natural disasters, health, and other potential risks like those related to adventure travel) collected from a range of publicly available information and assessments by our embassies and consulates. The information also takes into account decisions made to protect the safety of U.S. government personnel overseas, providing independent travelers with the same basic safety information the government gives its employees. Importantly, the analysis proceeds without regard to political or economic considerations.

The information considers standardized and objective factors to determine the tourism safety advice for each country, describing safety and security concerns without comparing one country against another. While the language has been adapted to reflect the situation in each country, the language generally touches on a few common issues:

- **Government Regulation:** Does the host government regulate the tourist industry? Are there standardized safety and security inspections? Is there an enforcement mechanism? Participation in hazardous activities should not mean ignoring obvious safety issues.
- **Participant Notification:** Will travelers understand when they may be participating in a hazardous activity? Is the signage adequate? Is there adequately trained staff around for supervision? Even travelers up for an adventure will still want to know when they have reached the area where they need to pay more attention.
- **Medical Capabilities:** Adventure can quickly turn into misadventure. In the event of an injury, how available is adequate medical care? Will an injured participant need to travel far for medical care? If the adventure activities tend to be located outside of a well-traveled path (e.g. capitals and other large cities, beaches and other resort-type areas), will travelers face major obstacles in obtaining medical care?
- **Insurance Recommendation:** Should travelers consider purchasing travel insurance prior to participating in hazardous activities abroad? (Hint: the answer here is always “[yes!](#)”) Additionally, remember that healthcare in many countries operates on a pay-first basis. Even the promise of the best insurance reimbursements around may not convince a provider to render services in an area where up-front payment is a requirement.

BUT WHAT ABOUT NON-U.S. CITIZENS?

The U.S. Department of State obviously has a mandate to ensure that U.S. citizens abroad have the best information possible to make informed decisions about their own safety and security. However, nothing prohibits non-U.S. citizens from following the same advice. OSAC’s mandate is to provide information to U.S.-based private-sector organizations, regardless of the citizenship of their employees, students, volunteers, or other personnel. Just as OSAC suggests its members consider advice not just from the U.S. Government but also from [other trustworthy partner nations](#) when creating their travel-security protocols, non-U.S. personnel will benefit from



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considering these new additions to the State Department stable of products. OSAC has published dozens of products in its Travelers Toolkit to help all travelers plan for safety and security, several of which touch on adventure travel (e.g. [Adventure Tourism Concerns: Bolivia](#), [Best Practices for a Safe Safari](#), and [When Wildlife Attacks](#)). OSAC is currently developing further reporting in the Adventure Tourism Concerns series as well.

FURTHER INFORMATION

OSAC is happy to help U.S. private-sector security managers considering how to add adventure travel provisions to their protocols. Contact your OSAC analyst to discuss further on a global, regional, or country-specific basis.

OSAC's mandate does not extend to the traveling public. However, the Department of State provides a free service to independent travelers with questions about this or any other security issue. In an emergency, the traveling public can contact the [nearest U.S. embassy or consulate](#), or call 1-888-407-4747 from the U.S. & Canada, or +1-202-501-4444 from anywhere else.