



Watch Your Step

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Introduction

When preparing an employee for international travel or an overseas assignment, a number of safety preparations must be undertaken. The employee will likely receive a briefing on the crime situation, the level of political violence, and the presence of any extremists groups in and around the area of travel and how those issues may affect the working environment. However, there are other, less emphasized aspects of security that can be just as important. One of these is an understanding of a country's traffic situation and what it means for pedestrians.

Travelers might find vehicle transportation in a foreign country a daunting prospect. Obtaining a license might be difficult or simply not practical for short-term travelers, and driving can be intimidating when you know neither the official nor the unofficial rules of the road. Taxis are generally an option, but they might not always be the best or safest option, especially in areas with major traffic congestion or during major events. Walking, then, becomes a likelihood, if not a necessity.



Traffic scene in Uganda

Mind the Gap

According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO) analyzing traffic accidents in 2010, pedestrians accounted for 22 percent of traffic deaths, totaling 270,000 fatalities worldwide. By contrast, 13,200 people globally died that same year from terrorist attacks. For the period from June 2012 to June 2013, at least 18 U.S. citizen pedestrians were killed in traffic accidents abroad (a slight decrease from the year prior). This represented approximately two percent of reported non-natural U.S. citizen deaths abroad.

There are a number of contributing factors to help explain these statistics. In the decade from 2002 to 2012, there was a 43 percent worldwide increase in the number of motorized vehicles produced per year. Rapid motorization without the accompanying road safety strategies and land use planning can be a recipe for disaster. For example, new multi-lane roads are often built to cut through communities without provision of safe routes and crossings for pedestrians. Speeding and drunk driving are also contributing

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factors. Laws for both are improving in many countries, but it often takes time for behavior and enforcement to follow suit.

Danger for pedestrians is more acute in developing nations. There, the rules of the road are not always clearly spelled out and, if they are, may be ignored with impunity. Red lights, for example, are often treated as suggestions to stop instead of mandates. In China, for example, vehicular lanes and directional travel are taken as recommendation, not law; bicycles and mopeds follow no rules of the road; and pedestrians cross and walk in traffic at will. In some countries, knowing how to drive is not even a prerequisite to obtaining a driver's license. Nigeria, for example, only recently made driving lessons and passing a formal test a requirement for obtaining a license. According to [Vietnam's Country Specific Information](#) page, "traffic accidents, including those involving a pedestrian and a motorized vehicle, are the single greatest health and safety risk you will face in Vietnam." [Haiti's Country Specific Information](#) page describes its traffic situation as "chaotic" and states that sidewalks and crosswalks, like in many developing countries, are rare. And, many countries do not have standards or mandates for vehicular maintenance and safety.

Even in more developed countries, traffic accidents are common. For example, in former British colonies, traffic moves on the left. Even seasoned travelers have stepped into the road before checking to the right for oncoming traffic. Other countries have designated areas for non-motorized vehicles, like bicycles and scooters, that may be confusing for laymen pedestrians. And, right of way customs vary even within a country.

In countries where mopeds (and alike) are commonplace, associated petty crime can affect pedestrians. It is not uncommon for a passenger on a moped to grab unsecured bags/purses from unsuspecting or distracted pedestrians while the driver then weaves through traffic to get away.

Walking a Smart Line

For organizations with personnel permanently in-country, it would be a good idea to map out regular walking paths, with the easiest roads to cross safely clearly highlighted. On an individual level, pedestrians should exercise good judgment any time they cross a street. On roads with steady, but slow streams of traffic, such as in Vietnam, it is important to walk slowly but with purpose. Hesitating or stepping back can confuse a driver or make him less likely to slow down or stop. Some countries also have crossing guards or dedicated pedestrian passageways that help people navigate difficult streets. If they do, find them and use them. In Germany, for example, pedestrians may only cross streets at designated crossing areas or face fines. Finally, an understanding that the traffic situation will be vastly different from the United States is a helpful tip in and of itself.

The Top Ten Most Dangerous Countries to be a Pedestrian, 2010 (Estimated traffic death rate for pedestrians per 100,000 population)

1. El Salvador (13.47)*
2. Liberia (12.6)
3. Uganda (11.91)
4. Zambia (10.9)
5. Vanuatu (10.87)
6. Dominican Republic (10.26)
7. Swaziland (10.11)
8. Comoros (9.92)
9. Kenya (9.8)
10. Iran (9.75)

Note: Not every country had available statistics

Note: Countries with a * next to them indicate that a U.S. citizen was among those killed

Additional Tips for Staying Safe

The following best practices for pedestrians are provided by the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration but can be applied in most countries:

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- Be predictable; follow the rules of the road and obey signs and signals
- Walk on sidewalks whenever they are available
- If there is no sidewalk, walk facing traffic and as far from traffic as possible
- Keep alert at all times; don't be distracted by electronic devices that take your eyes (and ears) off the road
- Cross streets at crosswalks or intersections whenever possible; this is where drivers expect pedestrians
- Look for cars in all directions – including those turning left or right
- If a crosswalk or intersection is not available, locate a well-lighted area where you have the best view of traffic; wait for a gap in traffic that allows you enough time to cross safely, and continue to watch for traffic as you cross
- Never assume a driver sees you; make eye contact with drivers as they approach you to make sure you are seen
- Be visible at all times; wear bright clothing during the day, and wear reflective materials or use a flashlight at night
- Watch for cars entering or exiting driveways, or backing up in parking lots
- Avoid alcohol and drugs when walking; they impair your abilities and judgment too

For Further Information

Please direct any questions regarding this report to OSAC's [Cross Regional Analyst](#).