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Out on a Limb

ADVICE FOR THE ADVENTURE TRAVELLER



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Department of Foreign Affairs
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Ministère des Affaires étrangères
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Canada

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Many Canadians look for unique travel adventures. They want to discover relatively untouched and unspoiled lands, experience different customs, reach new understandings of the world, see exotic flora and fauna, or extend the limits of their physical capabilities. These activities are exciting. But they can also be dangerous.

Before you leave

By doing your homework before you leave, you minimize the chances of something going wrong. Take the time to learn about your destination and what you are about to do. Most of all, before you undertake a trip that will test you mentally and physically, make sure you know yourself. Is this what you want to do? Is this something you are capable of doing?

To find out about local conditions before you leave, consult the Travel Reports published

by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). These reports provide information on safety and security conditions, health issues and entry and visa requirements for over 220 destinations. They can be found on DFAIT's Web site (www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/intro-en.asp), or you can order them by calling **1-800-267-6788** (in Canada) or **(613) 944-6788**. This information is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

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We would like to hear your comments on this booklet. Was it helpful? Write to us at the address given below or e-mail us at voyserv@dfait-maeci.gc.ca and let us know what you think.

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DFAIT also publishes a series of booklets on safe travel, including *Bon Voyage, But: Information for the Canadian Traveller* and *Her Own Way: Advice for the Woman Traveller*. These publications are

available on DFAIT's Web site (www.voyage.gc.ca), or you can order them by calling **1-800-267-8376** (in Canada) or **(613) 944-4000**.

Your trip is unique...and so are you

When choosing an adventure trip or excursion, there are many things to consider. Underestimating the risks or having too much confidence in your own abilities can lead to trouble, especially in extreme conditions or at unusual destinations.

Even though others are doing it, the risk for you may be different. Research your destination and be aware of the dangers. Conditions may vary from month to month.

In 1998, a young couple from Newfoundland went on a surfing holiday to a popular beach in

Indonesia. On the second day of the vacation, the woman watched helplessly as her boyfriend disappeared into the ocean. He was unfamiliar with local conditions and had underestimated the strong currents and undertow. His body was recovered four days later.

Two high school students and an adult guardian were drowned during a field trip along the rocky coast of California. A freak wave hit and the 45-year-old woman was pulled into the water. The two students died in a failed rescue attempt.

"It's safe because I'll have a tour guide."

Having a guide doesn't eliminate risk. There are many situations that guides cannot control.

A young, physically fit woman went on a guided rafting expedition in Nepal. On her way back to base camp, she and three others, including her guide, were crossing a small river. The current swept her down the river to her death. Her body was never found.

"It's safe because I'll be part of a group."

Travelling with a group doesn't eliminate risk, either. Never yield

Take precautions

1. Know what to expect on your trip. Enquire about the accommodations and food. Find out about the group size and about the gender, age and ability level of fellow

to others the responsibility for your own safety. Carefully research the company you plan to travel with. Speak to other clients who have already made the trip. Is the company responsible enough to reject clients who do not meet established preconditions?

A woman from Toronto signed on for a nature tour in Latin America. She became tired and told the guide she was going to stop for a rest and wait for the group to return. The group returned as arranged, but she wasn't there. She was never found despite extensive searching.

travellers. Some companies offer adventure tours geared to families or to specific groups based on age, gender or physical ability.

2. Assess the skills as well as the physical and mental stamina that will be required of you for the trip. Carefully evaluate your level of preparedness. Consult your physician and provide details about what you plan to do. Respect your personal capabilities. Your body will already be under stress from time and climate changes, unfamiliar food and a different environment. If needed, upgrade your skills. If that is not possible, don't go.
3. Talk to people who have similar interests and similar physical abilities to your own, and who have experience with this kind of travel.
4. Choose a company experienced in the type of adventure travel you're interested in and research their track record. Such companies should:
 - Provide rating systems indicating the difficulty level and the risks.
 - Employ good risk management practices.
 - Have a good cancellation policy.
 - Offer guides who speak the local language and are trained in first aid.
 - Use appropriately certified guides and instructors, if certifying bodies exist, such as PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors)

Supplemental health insurance

Do not rely on your provincial health plan to cover the costs if you get sick or are injured while you are abroad. At best, your health plan will cover only a portion of the bill.

It is your responsibility to obtain and understand the terms of your supplementary insurance policies.

Some credit cards offer health and travel insurance. Do not assume the card alone provides adequate coverage.

(www.padi.com) or DAN (Divers Alert Network) (www.diversalertnetwork.org), for scuba diving.

5. Find out if your destination is dangerous in either physical or political terms. In many countries there is political instability, police and judicial corruption, an ongoing war, insurgencies or sporadic unrest. Tourists can be lucrative targets for kidnapers. A wilderness expedition in such an environment is risky and foolhardy.

Getting medical advice

Before you leave, get advice on health issues at your destination. Health Canada strongly recommends an individual risk assessment by your doctor or a travel medicine specialist prior to travelling. Based on your health risks, the need for vaccinations

6. Detail what equipment and clothing you'll need. Take a medical kit, toiletries, and enough money to get you through an emergency. And remember that the longer you're going to be on your feet, the heavier your bag will become.
7. Buy comprehensive health, travel and life insurance. Many insurance policies do not cover activities that involve risk such as scuba diving, skydiving or even snorkelling. Always carry evidence of your insurance with you.

or other special precautions can be determined. Health Canada's Laboratory Centre for Disease Control provides travel health information through the Internet (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/osh/tmp_e.html).

You should visit a travel clinic well before your departure. The clinic will ensure that you receive the most current advice, as well as any vaccinations and medications that are necessary to avoid health problems while abroad. A list of travel clinics in your area can be obtained from Health Canada's Travel Medicine Program at **(613) 957-8739** or through the Internet (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/osh/travel/clinic_e.html), or from the Canadian Society for International Health at **(613) 241-5785**. If you have a pre-existing medical condition that could present

a problem while you are travelling, it is wise to wear a MedicAlert® bracelet. Through the MedicAlert® Foundation, your vital medical facts become part of a database that can be accessed 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world. Call **1-800-825-3785** for membership information or visit the MedicAlert® Web site (www.medicalert.ca).

If you require urgent assistance abroad, call the nearest Canadian mission or make a collect call to DFAIT in Ottawa at **(613) 996-8885**.