

Tools&Tips Travel

What You Need to Know Before You Go

Planning a new trip? Here's advice, updates, warnings and a touch of humor to help get you through the thicket of airport security rules, visa and vaccinations requirements, currency exchange rates, technology factors and travel scams.

Tips&AdviceBeat
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Terrorism, War, Civil Unrest: How to Avoid World Hot Spots

The best sites for obtaining breaking news on what's happening in popular and lesser-known travel destinations.

By [Randy Ross](#) — December 2, 2008

When planning an international trip, how do you know ahead of time what's going on thousands of miles away? A mistake can not only risk life and limb, but might also cost you some cash: Many travel insurance policies include a disclaimer that covers the companies when bullets start flying.

[Night view of the Taj Mahal Palace hotel before the recent terrorists attacks.]

([Photo: PlaneMad/Wikimedia](#))

Here's a list of news and information sites to visit before you buy any plane tickets.

265px-Taj_Mahal_Palace_Hotel_at_night.jpg

U.S. Government Sites

These pages are part of the U.S. State Department's travel site.

[Travel Warnings](#)

The Feds issue warnings when "long-term, protracted conditions" make a country dangerous. Other warnings are issued when the Feds' ability to help American citizens is limited because the U.S. embassy or consulate has been closed or has had a staff reduction. Nigeria was added to this list on Dec. 2. Other countries on the list include: Haiti, Nepal, Kenya, Colombia, and the Philippines.

state_dept.jpg

[Travel Alerts](#)

These tend to be short-term conditions and can include everything from natural disasters and anniversaries of terrorist events to demonstrations and high-profile events like regional sports matches. Countries currently on this list include India, Mexico and Thailand, which should settle down now that protesters are no longer blockading the airports.

Other Sites

As much as we love our government, sometimes officials' objectivity is a little suspect. Moreover, some countries receiving a lot of bad press may present great deals, or even opportunities for more adventurous travelers. The following sites provide information from international news organizations, expats living overseas, or recent world travelers:

- [International Herald Tribune](#) -- The "Global Edition of the New York Times," the Trib lets you browse the latest news by international region.
- [BBC News](#) -- Similar to the Herald Tribune -- full of information and easy to navigate.
- [Thorn Tree Travel Forum](#) -- Part of the Lonely Planet site and allows you to post questions.
- [Oriental Expat](#) -- Bills itself as the "expatriate portal for all things Asian." Recent postings included topics ranging from prostitution in Asia to tourism in Thailand to the cost of living in Hong Kong. Geared toward expatriates, it has lots of up-to-date information. Not for those with weak stomachs.
- [Bluenity](#) -- This social networking site is designed for travelers and provides buzz on travel destinations. Bluenity claims that you can also use it to meet other members at the airport, on the plane, or at your destination.

Experience At-a-Glance

News and forum sites to keep you out of trouble.

- [State Department's Travel Warnings](#) -- Shakey destinations that are worth further investigation.
- [State Department's Travel Alerts](#) -- Bad news, but likely only for the near-term.
- [International Herald Tribune](#) -- The global New York Times.
- [BBC News](#) -- For a non-U.S. perspective on events.
- [Thorn Tree Travel Forum](#) -- Part of Lonely Planet's site.

For more on planning a big trip:

- [How to Pick Great Destinations](#) -- Sites and online tools for finding locations that suit your taste and budget.