

Is travel insurance right for you?

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“Travellers from countries with national or socialized health plans buy travel health insurance as a matter of course when travelling outside their home countries,” said Roy Berger, CEO of MedJet Assist, a medical evacuation provider in Birmingham, Alabama. “That’s because their national health systems typically cover them when they are in their own countries only — additional coverage is necessary when travelling abroad.”

For Americans travelling abroad, most major US health plans cover costs for emergency treatment only. Basic Medicare (a government health care plan for senior citizens) does not provide coverage outside the US, but many Medicare supplement programs do.

Before you depart, contact your insurance provider and ask if you are covered when travelling abroad. Get specific -- ask about emergency treatment, hospitalization, the possibility of long-term care -- and determine what limits or exclusions apply. Regardless of where you are from, if treated for an emergency in another country, keep receipts for your medical expenses for reimbursement you when you return.

Travel agencies, banks and credit card providers frequently act as insurance brokers and can offer advice on plan specifics. The cost of medical insurance varies widely depending in the age and physical condition of the traveller, duration of the trip and destinations.

Infrequent travellers will get the best prices on policies that cover a single trip only. Frequent travellers should purchase annual plans that cover multiple trips.

Evacuation/repatriation assistance:

Another type of health-related insurance covers the cost of medical evacuation, which can reach into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. If you are injured or become severely ill abroad, this type of policy will pay for the high cost of taking an air ambulance back to your home country, or to a nearby country with better health care than the one you are in. Single trip policies typically run in the \$100 range; annual subscriptions cost approximately \$300.

To shop around for a travel insurance policy that suits you best, talk to a travel agent or see online sites such as insuremytrip.com, oncallinternational.com, squaremouth.com or travelinsurancereview.net.

Chris McGinnis is the business travel columnist for BBC Travel

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