



BRITONS ABROAD ARE “IGNORING TRAVEL ADVICE”

Think-tank report calls for improved communication of information for travellers

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Record numbers of people are getting in trouble abroad each year because they are failing to take notice of appropriate travel advice, according to a new report published by The Foreign Policy Centre.

Travel Advice: Getting Information To Those Who Need It by Rachel Briggs shows that between 1995 and 2000 the number of Britons detained overseas increased by over half and the number of emergency passports issued rose by a quarter. Meanwhile, it is estimated that less than 10 per cent of travellers are consulting the Foreign Office web-site and only nine per cent of travellers surveyed could name a risk they might face whilst abroad.

The report calls for the FCO to collaborate with Tour Operators and Business to supplement general advice for the “travelling British public” with more tailored information. It outlines a strategy for getting relevant advice through to Business travellers, backpackers and holiday-makers on package tours – from including travel information with air-tickets to texting younger travellers with travel tips.

ANALYSIS:

- **More Britons are travelling abroad than ever before** - 60 million in 2002, with a further 10 per cent growth expected over the next two years.
- **The rising popularity of Adventure Tourism and the growing presence of Business employees in emerging markets have led to more people going to more dangerous places.** The most recent figures show that between 1998 and 2000, travel to the Middle East rose by just over 20% and Travel to Africa increased by 16.7%. All of the kidnaps of British nationals, two-thirds of all serious robberies and nearly half of all rapes happened in less frequently visited areas. (outside the top 10 most visited countries).
- **Though the FCO travel advice web-site provides excellent content, only a small minority of travelers consult its advice:** The FCO estimates that its travel pages generate 540 000 unique users per month, or 6.5 million each year. If each unique user equated to one overseas trip it would mean that the site was being accessed in just **10 per cent of trips.**

**For briefings, interviews or a copy of *Travel Advice: Getting Information to Those Who Need It*,
call Rob Blackhurst on 0207 401 5355/ 07879 423341**

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- **Britons have a poor appreciation of the risks they face when travelling overseas.** According to an opinion poll, just **nine per cent** of respondents were able to name a potential risk they had been exposed to on their last overseas trip.
- **There is anecdotal evidence that travellers often assume their safety is in the hands of others:** Those on package tours can assume that the tour operator is looking after their interests. Business Employees in dangerous areas often assume that their employer would not expose them to risk. Aid workers can place too much faith in the humanitarian nature of their work protecting them from harm.
- **Employees for Small and Medium Size Businesses in dangerous regions are particularly at risk:** Unlike multinational companies, they do not often have dedicated Security Managers and cannot generally afford to pay for specialist travel advice services.

Recommendations:

- **The Foreign Office should develop literature appropriate for each kind of traveller**, which could then be distributed by Business, NGOs and tour operators. They could publish **tips for safe business travel in emerging markets** in association with the CBI, safe business trips for Small and Medium Size Enterprises; and produce advice for aid and development workers in conflict zones, perhaps in association with the Department for International Development or the UN.
- The FCO should provide **travel advice that can be disseminated** in ways that are more likely to reach travellers – **through mobile phones, text messaging and Palm personal organizers.**
- **The Foreign Office should consider teaming up with Airlines and Tour Operators to send out travel advice with flight tickets or travel documents.** Information aimed at **business travellers** could be placed within **executive departure lounges**; tour operators could **hand out flyers** on the **dangers of drugs to clubbers** in places like Ibiza.
- **The FCO should work with the travel industry to ensure that the official travel advice site is routinely found by** those searching on-line for “flights”, “insurance” and “travel”. It should also appear on search engines when people look for information about individual countries.
- **When accidents occur the British Consulate should ask those involved whether they had seen and acted on the relevant travel advice.** This would

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provide important information to judge the value official advice. Currently, the Foreign Office has no information about how effective their advice is in practice.

- **Each British Embassy should appoint a Regional Security Officer** to liaise with British Business personnel overseas and advise on security issues. The US State Department already has a member of staff within each US Embassy for this purpose.

Rachel Briggs said:

“Thousands of hours of consular time are spent picking up the pieces after easily avoidable accidents. It would be far better for the travelling public and the Foreign Office if official advice was getting through”.

Manny Fontenla-Novoa, Managing Director, Thomas Cook Tour Operations, said:

“Making sure that our customers enjoy a fun and trouble-free holiday is important to us. That’s why we provide a wealth of health and safety information before departure and at the welcome meetings in resort. We fully support any moves that will make holiday-makers more aware and therefore more likely to avoid potential holiday hazards and ultimately have a fantastic time”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The Foreign Policy Centre was established by the Prime Minister in 1998 to examine the implications of globalization on Foreign and Domestic policy.
2. The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author. The project is kindly supported by Thomas Cook Tour Operations. For further information contact Una Mullan, Head of PR at Thomas Cook Ltd, on 01733 416 233.
3. Rachel Briggs runs the Risk and Security Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre. Her work focuses on how the changing security environment impacts on personal and corporate safety and security. Her previous report, *The Kidnapping Business*, was published last year.
4. Many tour operators, travel agents and other travel industry organisations have begun offering travel advice to their customers, usually re-packaging the FCO’s advice in brochures, on their web sites, and at welcome meetings in the resort. (See Appendix 1). There are a number of points of contact between Thomas Cook and its customers when travel advice is delivered:
 - Brochure: contains a high level of resort information
 - Booking: when booking directly with Thomas Cook, passengers receive information about the resort and any significant pieces of travel advice

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- Travel documents (sent approx. 4 weeks before departure): Thomas Cook sends a booklet about the resort being visited. This includes information about what to do before you go, what to pack, getting to the airport, information about health in the air, information about the resort, safety and security tips, emergencies, useful contact numbers
- In the resort: Thomas Cook, like many other tour operators, runs welcome meetings where reps are able to raise issues about safety and security
Thomas Cook staff also attend regular meetings of major tour operators in the 50-60 main resorts around the world

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