

Travel Insurance: how to make sure you get the best rate, and the best cover

When planning a holiday, the last thing you want to think about is the things that could go wrong. But things do go wrong – so travel insurance should be on your to-do list. A short-term insurance expert takes you through the things you need to look for.

Did you know that travel insurance to the US, Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean might be more expensive than cover for other countries (or that travel to these destinations might be excluded from your policy)? This is because healthcare in those areas costs more than it does elsewhere. There are some countries that will not allow access unless you have travel insurance, – for instance you cannot get a Schengen visa without travel insurance. These issues, and the sheer variety of travel insurance on offer, can make the whole process seem daunting. But taking it step by step can help you make the right choice.

Before you travel: choose a policy

First, determine your needs: Consider the duration of your trip, the activities you plan to engage in and the type of travel (a business trip where you spend all your time at a conference centre might carry less risk than an adventure safari). Are you travelling alone, or do you need cover for a family group? Think about possible medical expenses, trip cancellations or interruptions, the possibility of lost baggage, and any other specific risks you may encounter. Then check if you have other kinds of insurance: Your medical aid might offer an international travel benefit, or you might be eligible for travel insurance if you pay for the trip with your credit card. If you have this kind of cover, you must understand the terms. You could use this type of insurance and then purchase cheaper forms of travel insurance as “gap cover”. But it is not advisable to rely only on the coverage offered by credit card insurance or your medical aid travel benefit as there may be limitations to the breadth of coverage.

Compare different policies: Shop around, looking at the coverage and prices offered by different insurance providers. Look for a policy that suits the needs you listed at the start and that works for your budget, considering the cost of the cover and its limitations. It is crucial to confirm the policy terms and conditions regarding territorial exclusions: does the policy cover the countries you are visiting? Once you've narrowed down your choices, read the policy wording thoroughly: Make sure that you understand the terms and conditions, including coverage limits, exclusions and claim processes. It is important to look for age-related exclusions, as some policies don't cover older people, for instance. And some policies might not cover pre-existing medical conditions.

Buying a policy

Get it done early: It is important to buy travel insurance soon after you book your trip, that means you are covered for any unexpected events that may occur before your departure. One should always declare pre-existing medical conditions: If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, be honest and declare them. Failing to disclose such conditions might invalidate your policy. Know your policy expiry dates: Make sure your policy is active for the entire duration of your trip. If your travel plans are delayed, extend your coverage before it expires.

When you travel

Keep copies: Take copies of your travel insurance policy, receipts, and any other relevant documentation. This will help you if you need to make a claim. Leave copies of these with a local family member or friend, or with your insurance broker. If the country you are travelling to wants proof of travel insurance, it is best to have a printed copy on hand. (Some countries are happy to accept a digital version).

Keep track: Keep records of any expenses incurred due to travel disruptions or emergencies. This includes medical bills, receipts for alternative transportation arrangements, and documentation of any cancellations or interruptions. Should you need to claim, the insurer will need these details.

Understand the claim process: Know how to notify the insurance provider in case of an emergency, and what documentation is needed to make a claim. It is also important to be aware of any deadlines for filing claims. Bear in mind that you will usually need to pay out of your pocket and submit claims when you return home. Please do not expect the insurer to assist you while you are travelling unless it is a serious situation involving hospitalisation or other more serious matters.

Keep emergency contact information handy: Make sure to have the contact details of your travel insurance provider and any emergency assistance services easily available. This will help you seek immediate help in case of emergencies.

There are a range of travel insurance options available and it can help to consult with a professional insurance adviser when making plans for that holiday.

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