



DEPARTMENT OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
TRADE

Death overseas

www.dfat.gov.au/travel



AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES



Death overseas

Each year almost 600 Australian travellers die overseas, usually through illness or accident. The death of a loved one is always distressing for friends and family. When a death occurs in a foreign country, a sense of isolation and confusion may intensify such feelings.

Consular staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra and overseas understand the need for a swift and compassionate response. We have prepared this brochure to help those who need information and support at a time when they may feel isolated and vulnerable.

What can the Consular Service do?

In a practical sense we can:

- ▶ provide a list of local funeral directors
- ▶ ensure the local funeral director is aware of Australian regulations
- ▶ help with translations if an English-speaking firm is not available
- ▶ advise on the cost of local burial, local cremation or transport of the remains back to Australia
- ▶ advise on the cost of transporting any personal property back to Australia
- ▶ advise on how to transfer any funds
- ▶ help with local knowledge, such as health regulations

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- ▶ if necessary, help identify the body
 - ▶ help obtain quarantine clearance for the return of the body
 - ▶ help with registering the death
 - ▶ manage media enquiries on behalf of families.

If there is evidence of suspicious circumstances, we can press for an investigation by local authorities and pass on the results.

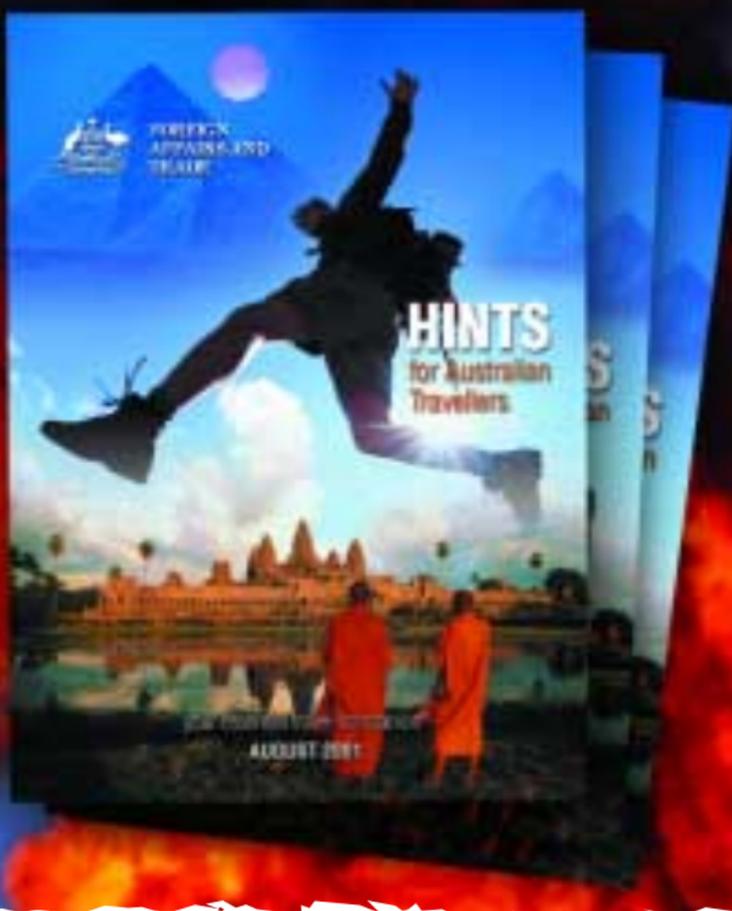
What the Consular Service cannot do

We will do everything in our power to assist, and we can often help with our knowledge and understanding of the local environment. But we must also work within the legal and administrative processes that apply in the host country.

These processes may often appear unfamiliar, and even unnecessarily demanding for a family whose main priority is to bring the body of their loved one back home. So one of our most important responsibilities is to keep family and friends informed and to provide advice as required.

These are the things we can't do:

- ▶ investigate the death ourselves
- ▶ pay burial or cremation expenses
- ▶ pay for the return of the remains to Australia
- ▶ pay any outstanding debts.



ADVISING

AUSTRALIAN TRAVELLERS Each year over 3.5 million Australians travel overseas, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provides consular assistance to more than 20 000 Australians who encounter serious difficulties during their travels.

To assist Australian travellers, our public information program provides advice on travel risks and seeks to highlight ways of minimising or avoiding difficulty overseas. Our web site is increasingly important as a means to reach Australians travelling overseas with regularly updated information and travel advice on more than 100 countries and issues. The number of registered 'hits' on www.dfat.gov.au/travel exceeds 3 million each year.

The publication *Hints for Australian Travellers* contains the contact details of all Australian overseas posts that provide consular services to Australian travellers, and includes useful travel information and advice to help Australians have a positive travel experience. More than a dozen other free publications are also available to the public and may be ordered online through www.dfat.gov.au/travel, by phone on: 02 6261 3305, 1 300 555 135 or (fax) 02 6261 3305.



Insurance

We strongly recommend that all Australians travelling overseas take out travel insurance to cover the costs of hospitalisation and medical treatment while overseas. **The policy should also cover the costs incurred as a result of death.** Your insurance company can reduce significantly the stress on relatives by providing advice and taking care of most of the arrangements and costs associated with a local funeral or the return of the body to Australia.

Unfortunately, many Australians are still travelling overseas without adequate insurance cover. If they should die, it falls to the family to make the funeral arrangements and meet the costs involved, just as they would in Australia. Such costs can exceed \$10 000 to bring a body back home to Australia.

If you're travelling with someone who dies— what do you need to do?

If you're overseas when your partner, relative or friend dies, you'll need to have the following information to hand when making the necessary arrangements:

- ▶ the deceased's full name
- ▶ their date of birth
- ▶ their passport number
- ▶ where and when the passport was issued
- ▶ their next-of-kin
- ▶ if the deceased was suffering from any communicable illness
- ▶ whether they had travel insurance and if so, the name and contact details of the company.



If the death is unexpected and did not occur in a hospital, the local police will be involved and should notify the nearest Australian mission.

Both your insurance company, or your nearest Australian mission can help to notify next-of-kin in Australia.

Your call to an Australian overseas post will be answered either by a duty officer at the post, or it will be transferred automatically to our 24-hour operations centre in Canberra. If your call is answered by an answering machine listen carefully to all the options.

Contact details for Australian overseas posts (this may be an Australian embassy, high commission or consulate) are listed in the booklet *Hints for Australian travellers* which is issued with your passport. This free booklet, which is updated every six months, can also be obtained by email (brochures@dfat.gov.au), telephone on (02) 6261 2803, or can be ordered online through www.dfat.gov.au/travel



Frequently asked questions

What happens if a family member dies overseas?

Through provisions in international law, the nearest Australian mission should always be notified of the death of an Australian citizen. If a tour company or a friend notifies us, we always double-check the information with the local police. We will then contact the Australian Federal Police who will visit the next-of-kin to pass on the news. They will give you contact details for the Consular Branch, who will be able to give you further details about the death and advice on the steps you will need to take. We can provide support and advice including the costings for a local funeral or for the return of the body to Australia. We can also assist, where necessary, with the transfer of funds.

While our consular staff will make every effort to ensure that relatives do not first learn of a death via the media, we cannot always prevent it from happening. If you hear of the death from the media, a tour operator or any other third party, you should contact Consular Branch on (02) 6261 3305 or 1 300 555135. At the request of the recognised immediate family, DFAT can manage queries from the media on the family's behalf.

If an Australia citizen dies overseas, what happens to the body?

The next-of-kin will be consulted about the deceased's wishes and every effort will be made to meet these.



If an Australian citizen is travelling alone, how will relatives learn of their death?

Depending on the circumstances, the consulate staff will pass the information on to DFAT staff in Canberra who will ask the local police to inform the next-of-kin.

Will DFAT pay for the overseas funeral, or the return of an Australian citizen to the Australia?

No. This is a matter for the next-of-kin and the deceased's insurance company. But we can help with any necessary arrangements.

If a relative or friend dies overseas, will the next-of-kin have to travel to the country?

This is not necessary unless they wish to. The Australian consulate can normally arrange for a competent local undertaker to arrange everything and help the next-of-kin with the transfer of funds.

What happens if death occurs in a country where there is no Australian diplomatic representation?

Who can help?

DFAT's consular network extends to some 160 points of service around the world. Under a consular agreement Canada, there are 19 locations where Australians have access to consular services through embassies and high commissions managed by the Canadian Government. Informal arrangements also exist with other consular services—including those of the United Kingdom and the United States—to lend assistance to Australians in need. If there is no Australian representation in the country to which you're travelling, it is important to establish who can provide you consular assistance. The 24-hour



Consular Operations Centre (COC) can also be contacted for advice from anywhere in the world on 61 2 6261 3305.

Consular services brochures

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared a range of brochures for Australians planning to travel overseas:

- ▶ *Backpacking overseas?*
- ▶ *Consular services charter*
- ▶ *For the travelling senior*
- ▶ *If you are arrested or gaoled overseas*
- ▶ *If you are the victim of sexual assault while travelling overseas*
- ▶ *Living and working overseas*
- ▶ *Tips for women travellers*
- ▶ *Travel information for Dual Nationals*
- ▶ *Travelling overseas?*
- ▶ *Travelling to Bali*
- ▶ *Travelling well—some tips for staying healthy*
- ▶ *What to do when someone is missing overseas*
- ▶ *Hints for Australian Travellers* (also issued free with your passport)

Copies of these brochures are available at DFAT offices in Canberra and state capitals, from overseas posts, and selected travel agents. You can also *email brochures@dfat.gov.au* to obtain copies or order online at *www.dfat.gov.au/travel/order_brochure.html*



The Vice Consul at the Australian Embassy in Beirut, Kerin Burns (right), conducts a prison visit. There are some 200 Australians in prison overseas — the department regularly visits those who wish to avail themselves of this service

ASSISTING

AUSTRALIANS The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) assists more than 20 000 Australians in serious difficulty each year, including Australians who are hospitalised, arrested or imprisoned overseas. This number represents a small proportion of the 3.5 million Australians who travel overseas each year. The department's 24-hour Consular Operations Centre has been a significant development in our services to the Australians, and each year we receive more than 80 000 calls on our public lines.

The management of crises affecting Australians overseas is central to the department's consular responsibility. DFAT's responsibilities have included the coordination of responses to civil unrest in Indonesia, East Timor, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. DFAT also responded positively and compassionately to the concerns of Australian families following the attacks in the United States in 2001, and assumed a major role in assisting victims and their families following the deaths of 14 young Australians in a Swiss canyoning accident in Interlaken, Switzerland, in 1999.

DFAT's consular network has expanded to more than 160 points of service around the world. These include overseas posts managed by DFAT and Austrade, an honorary consul program, and consular sharing arrangements with a number of Canadian embassies and high commissions.



Where is your Consul?

Consular officers can be found in Australian diplomatic and consular posts abroad. These overseas posts are usually located in capital cities but there are also some in regional centres. Sometimes the head of an Australian consulate will be an Honorary Consul who may be a citizen of another country. Not all countries have an Australian diplomatic or consular post but there is usually an Australian post in the region. You may also find that another country's representative, such as the British consulate, will help you until an Australian consular official can contact you.

Addresses and telephone numbers of Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates can be found in local telephone directories, hotels, tourist offices and police stations in the country concerned.

A Directory of Australian overseas posts appears in the 'Your Information Base' section of each edition of *Hints for Australian Travellers*. This booklet is issued with your passport.

In some countries where there is no Australian diplomatic or consular post, consular assistance can be provided to Australians by Canadian diplomatic or consular posts. Canadian posts that help Australians are listed in the *Hints* booklet.



NB: While every care has been taken in preparing this brochure, neither the Australian Government nor its agents or employees, including any member of Australia's diplomatic and consular staff abroad, can accept liability for any injury, loss or damage arising in respect of any statement contained therein.

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Consular services, including information for travellers and Travel Advices, are also available from the Consular homepage on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's web site:

www.dfat.gov.au/travel