

Ten top tips to getting real cover while you're away



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Travel insurance is an essential part of a relaxing trip, at home as well as abroad and cancellation cover and loss of baggage is just as relevant on a UK break. Dial An Exchange is committed to providing the best holiday-related advice, so we decided to ask an expert in the field for some good advice on holiday insurance. Ian Hollins is the Managing Director of Insurance Quote line. He is also a timeshare owner and Chairman of his resort's Owners Association. Dial An Exchange is grateful for his considered contribution.

A common myth is that travel insurance is not required when travelling in Europe and that an E111 gives all the cover you need. Let's not beat about the bush here, reciprocal medical treatment is part of our agreement with our European partners. We all know our own NHS hospitals have some shortcomings but these surely pale into insignificance when you face the prospect of emergency treatment in some EU countries (which shall remain nameless!).

It's also worth remembering that the average cost of a repatriation from a southern European country following something like a heart attack, can cost £16,000* and from the USA can cost £45,000*. Neither the UK Government nor the carrying of an E111 will cover these costs, so unless you have very deep pockets, insurance cover is the only way most of us can afford to get home when something goes wrong.

Europeans and Brits in particular, have become particularly adventurous, with the number of us taking 2 or more holidays a year increasing by 60% from 1971 – 1998, (see footnote (a)). It's not just the frequency of visits but the destinations that have increased. Visitors to the United States increased by a staggering 700% over the same period (see footnote (b)).

We already know that the US is the most litigious country on earth and the costs of medical treatment in the US reflect this, with procedures costing many times the cost in Europe.

Competition for insurance products has never been fiercer with 'bundled' products being offered by banks, building societies, credit card companies etc, but this 'one size fits all' approach may not be in your best interests. I always use the analogy that if I walk into a shoe shop that only has

1 pair of shoes on the shelf they're unlikely to be my perfect fit.

The same is true of insurance, and the number of companies offering just one product can mean you have to do an awful lot of shopping around to get the best deal for you.....or get someone to do it for you.

It may sound terribly old fashioned but a good broker works for you, and provides a professional service in an environment as highly regulated as accounting and the legal profession. If you simply haven't got the time (or the inclination) to do your own research or you know already that you don't tick all the 'standard fit' boxes, then a broker on your side can be the difference between a helpful insurer resolving your problem whilst you are away or you spending your holiday making long distance phone calls.

Using the Ten Top Tips below will help you to get the cover you need within budget:

Tip 1 - Age

Some insurers have an age cut-off that no longer reflects people's travelling habits, often as low as 65. Others, however, have no upper age limit and look at each case on merit. If you are approaching 65 or your insurer's upper age limit, ask them how they treat existing customers beyond this age. If they will no longer cover you, be assured, others will!

Tip 2 - Medical Conditions

Always tell your insurer of ANY pre-existing conditions no matter how long you have been symptom- or medication-free. If the condition is current and can't be accepted at 'normal terms' you will usually be given one of three options

- a) pay a small additional premium
- b) accept a higher excess





c) exclude cover altogether. Be aware that most bundled policies from banks etc will only ever exclude cover

If you develop a condition between arranging the cover and the date of the trip, be sure to contact your insurer.

Tip 3 - Timeshare Cover

It's a little known fact that most insurers will NOT pay for the cost of your timeshare week under the cancellation clause as they consider that the cost of the management fees for your week and any exchange fee is directly lost as a result of a trip cancellation.

There are policies available that are more aware of the needs of timeshare owners and these don't necessarily cost more. www.timesharetravelinsurance.com is a good resource for this, or speak to Dial an Exchange.

Tip 4 - Regular Travellers

As a rule of thumb if you holiday twice a year or more you will get better value from a multi trip / annual policy. Don't always assume that the 'pay as you go' system will work out more cheaply.

Tip 5 - Consider the Worst

Whilst it's not a pleasant thought, deaths abroad do happen. Some policies refuse to repatriate your loved one and insist on a

local burial, denying family and friends the opportunity to say goodbye. Check that the policy offers repatriation.

Tip 6 - Wine Tasting

Ask if your policy has any restrictions on cover if you have consumed alcohol. Whilst it is understandable that insurers may want to limit their exposure to the accidents caused by Club 18-30 style pub crawl binges, don't become the unwilling victim of a blanket exclusion just because you had a glass of wine with dinner.

Tip 7 - Arranging your own flights

With the growth of so-called low cost airlines it has never been easier to book flights to wherever you want to go. But, unlike the legacy carriers, this new breed of airline doesn't offer connecting flights or through-checked luggage, and if you do book two separate flights to connect you need to make sure that you meet the airport's minimum connecting time (MCT) between flights. Even then, not all policies protect you against delayed flights and missed connections as the bookings are not all on one ticket.

Tip 8 - Living 'Over the Brush'

Check your policy's definition of 'immediate family'. Even in 2008 not all insurers include common law partners.

Tip 9 - Taking the Kids/Grand Kids

Look out for 'kids go free' offers. Many insurers now offer a 'kids go free' option and this can also apply to single parents. This can substantially reduce the cost of your insurance.

Tip 10 - Air Ambulance

Check that your policy provides for an air ambulance. In the quest to offer cheaper premiums some companies have stopped offering this vital feature in favour of repatriation on a commercial flight.

Whatever your holiday holds and wherever you go with Dial an Exchange, have a great time and I hope your insurance policy remains a safety blanket that you don't need to call on.

Ian Hollins is Managing Director of www.InsuranceQuoteline.net and its timeshare division www.TimeshareTravelInsurance.com

*Figures supplied by First Assist Services Ltd, taken from FCO website May 2008

(a) Source: UK Tourism Survey, Department of Culture, Media and Sports

(b) Source: International Passenger Survey, Office for National Statistics