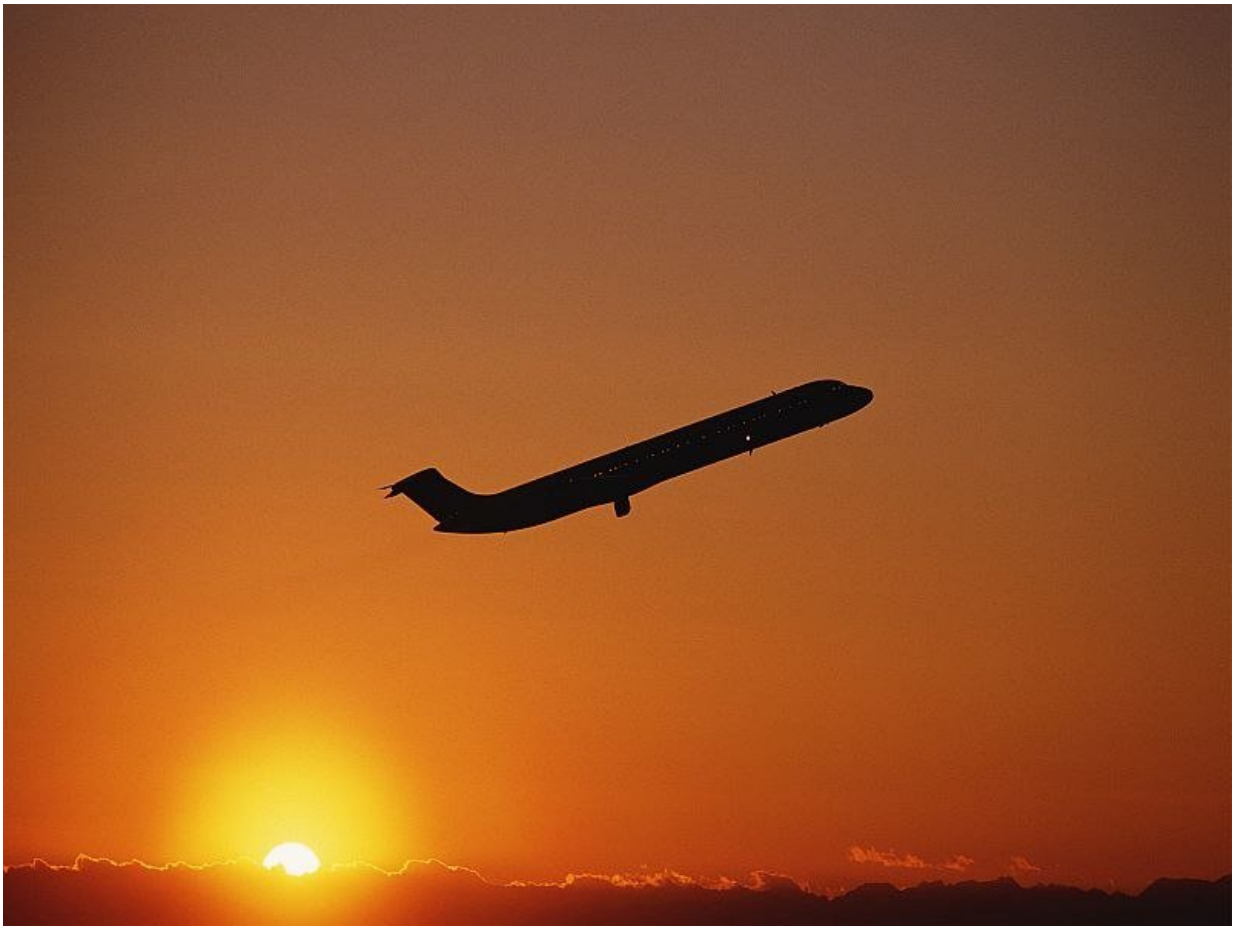
Smart steps for safer international travel

June 5 2018, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Experiencing other cultures, visiting world landmarks and tasting foreign cuisines are just some of the pleasures of international travel.

But for a safer trip, take these steps before you leave home.

Check the U.S. State Department website for any travel alerts or warnings concerning your destination. Double check that you have all needed documents starting with a U.S. passport. If you already have a passport, take a moment to check the expiration date. Some countries require it to be valid for six months beyond your planned stay.

While a few countries may allow you to enter with only a birth certificate and a driver's license, you must have a valid passport to re-enter the United States. If you're traveling by land or sea to certain destinations, you may be able to use the new U.S. passport card instead of the normal passport book.

If you're traveling with children, find out if they need any additional documents now required by some countries to help prevent child abductions.

Let family members at home know to call the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at 1-888-407-4747 in case of emergency; an officer at the local consulate will then try to contact you.

Make two copies of all your travel documents. Leave one with a friend or relative at home and take the other with you. But keep the copies separate from the originals, which should be within reach at all times.

Here are key travel documents:

- Passport ID page
- Foreign visa (if applicable)
- Itinerary
- Hotel confirmation
- Airline ticket

- Driver's license
- Credit cards brought on the trip
- Traveler's check serial numbers
- Contact information for the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate

Get any needed shots and bring an International Certificate of Vaccination or other proof with you. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers vaccination recommendations and other health precautions for trips abroad.

Know where to get medical help abroad, should you need it, and find out if your health insurance covers you outside the United States.

If your health insurance is lacking or has a very high deductible, consider getting a short-term plan for travel with evacuation insurance in case of a serious health emergency.

Pack light and consider leaving valuables like jewelry at home. Double-check that you aren't taking any items prohibited on an airplane or at your destination.

Finally, as you're researching stops on your itinerary, look up local laws and customs, so that you won't make any legal missteps in a foreign country.

More information: The U.S. State Department has a wealth of information for citizens traveling abroad.

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Citation: Smart steps for safer international travel (2018, June 5) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-06-smart-safer-international.html

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