

## UNHAPPY TRAVELS

# What to do if you're traveling in a city struck by a terror attack



In the wrong city, at the wrong time. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)

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The March 22 bombings of the Brussels international airport and a metro station in the Belgian capital provide a particularly poignant reminder to travelers: Be prepared to deal with the possibility of terrorism when you're away from home.

Visitors to a terror-stricken city face unique challenges. Unlike residents, they don't have a home base where they can regroup. Staying informed will be more difficult if they don't speak the local language or are not familiar with local media. With travel plans derailed, they may have to make difficult decisions about what to do, or where to go, next.

Here is some advice cobbled from government agencies and safety experts on what to do if terror strikes in the middle of a trip.

### Plan ahead

Travelers should have a contingency plan before they leave home. Share your itinerary with your family or work colleagues so they can track you down if they don't hear from you. Make arrangements with your fellow travelers on how to reconnect in case you get stranded.

If you're an American citizen, you can sign up for the US State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), which will help US embassy officials and family members get in touch with you in an emergency. You will also automatically receive alerts about conditions on the ground.

During a disaster, communications usually jam up. That happened in Brussels, where authorities are pleading that phone use be limited to free up the networks. Scott Hume, director of security operations at Global Rescue, a crisis management firm, says he always carries a satellite phone as a backup. That's an option, if you can't afford to be incommunicado.

### Find a safe haven

In the midst of the confusion during or after an attack, Hume recommends that travelers go back to their hotel via taxi or Uber (or a similar car service) to avoid the chaos. Don't use public transit, he tells Quartz, and resist the temptation of going back to the attack site to gawk.

Stay safe at the hotel until things settle, he says. Aside from offering shelter, and most likely food and an internet connection, hotels offer disoriented travelers an invaluable resource: the front desk. Hotel staff will usually be well equipped to help guests understand the situation on the ground, Hume says.

### Stay tuned in

Keep up with the latest news via local media and authorities. In Brussels, the Belgian Federal Crisis Center has been posting useful announcements, in English, on Facebook and Twitter.

If you can't find local information in your language, check in with your country's foreign affairs ministry. The US State Department has been tweeting updates, and has set up a dedicated page with information on the Brussels attacks. Your country's embassy is also a good source. Canada's embassy in Belgium, for example, has been compiling information from several local sources in its Twitter feed.

### Be patient

Be prepared to stay put for a while. It will probably take local authorities some time to sort out conditions on the ground. Stick to their recommendations on when and how it's safe to leave, says Hume.

Be patient, too, when rescheduling travel plans. Airlines will be overwhelmed. You might be better off driving to the nearest big city to fly out of its airport, or just delaying your departure, he adds.