

## Traveling to Europe Post-Brussels Attacks: What U.S. Travelers Need to Know for Summer Vacation

Travel risk experts say summer travel plans should not be altered because of high-profile terrorist attacks, but instead advise being well-educated about what to do in an emergency.

Mia Taylor Apr 6, 2016 2:15 PM EDT



If there's one message travel risk experts have for Americans in the wake of the Brussels terrorist attacks and heading into the busy summer travel season, it is this: do not live in fear.

To that experts add, continue traveling, but do so well-prepared for an emergency.

"Travel can continue," says Matt Bradley, Regional Security Director at International SOS, one of the world's leading medical and travel security risk services companies. "That's the number one point. Continue traveling to Europe or anywhere else. Should there be some modifications? Yes...Arm yourself with information before you go and know how you would respond in case of an incident."

The March 22 attacks in Brussels -- two explosions at the airport and another at a subway station -- killed at least 30 people and wounded about 230 others with bombs that were packed with nails. It was the deadliest attack in Europe since the Paris incident about four months ago. ISIS claimed responsibility for the Brussels attacks.

The State Department has since issued an unusually broad travel alert for all of Europe. The alert notes that terrorist groups continue to plan near-term attacks all over the continent, targeting sporting events, tourist sites, restaurants and transportation.

While it's nearly impossible to predict where or when an attack might occur, says Bradley, firms like his focus on preparing travelers for emergencies. Among his top advice for American travel clients is:

- Curb your itinerary - minimize unnecessary activity
- Try and stay away from crowded public areas or large events
- Remain alert when in crowds

If you intend to go to a large market, plaza or public square, identify a location that could provide shelter in the event of an emergency - someplace close by, that would allow you to get off the street.

Have a trustworthy source of information, one that is not social media.

"Anyone can put anything out on social media," Bradley says. "A lot of misinformation goes out. It's not reliable. You should have an information source that not only validates what's happening, but also provides advice."

One source of such information is a travel risk company, whose job it is to monitor problems and threats and can communicate with you via text messages or an app.

The International SOS Assistance App, for instance, provides members with information in more than 200 countries and 300 cities around the world, including alerts and medical and travel information.

The State Department also offers a travel alert ser-

vice known as the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). The free offering allows U.S. citizens and nationals who are traveling abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Those who sign-up receive information from the embassy about safety conditions in their destination country. Registration with STEP also helps U.S. embassies contact you in an emergency, whether it be a natural disaster, civil unrest or family emergency.

Being educated and prepared before departing on a trip, says Bradley, is the most important change travelers can make to adapt to the current state of world affairs.

"I think it's important to not live in fear, that is the primary objective of terrorism," Bradley says.

Numerous other travel and security experts echo Bradley's support for continued travel.

Many note that terrorist attacks are nothing new - pointing for example, to the 2004 Madrid train bombings carried out by an Al-Qaeda-inspired terrorist cell that left 191 dead and about 2,000 injured, as well as the 2005 incident in Britain, which involved coordinated suicide attacks on three underground lines, killing 56 and wounding about 700.

"There's no doubt the recent tragic events in Europe are deeply unsettling, and it's perfectly reasonable for travelers to question their travel plans to Europe for the summer," says Greg Geronemus, co-CEO of smar-Tours. "However, it's also important to look at the situation in Europe objectively. As disturbing as the headlines have been, everyone should keep in mind that the risk of being injured in a terror attack in Europe still pales in comparison to the risk of being injured in many everyday activities, including driving your car."

In fact, Geronemus says there is no safer place to be than a destination recently involved in a terror event, because security and general awareness is at a record high level after such an attack.

"The State Department alert should serve as a reminder of what everyone already knows - that there is an elevated security threat in various parts of Europe," Geronemus says. "However, it should not be interpreted as a suggestion to stay at home. There is some degree of risk in different destinations around the world,

just as there is risk in the United States of America in everyday life."

**Global Rescue, another travel risk and crisis management firm, has been actively advising clients about travel to Europe, (both individuals and corporations), since the Brussels attacks. The firm offers numerous safety precautions and tips.**

For instance, while traveling within a foreign city, consider using taxi or ride sharing services such as Uber, rather than public transportation, in order to reduce exposure to crowds and large gatherings.

In addition, always have local currency and an ATM or credit card available to pay for transportation and other needs in the event of an emergency.

It's also important to carry a paper map of the city or region you're visiting, which can be used in the event of cellular or Internet loss. And for coordination purposes, make sure all of your travel companions are using the same map.

Finally, have a plan to communicate with someone back home in the event of an emergency, crisis or attack. Cellular networks can quickly become overwhelmed, as was the case in Brussels and Paris immediately following the attacks, so having an alternate means of communication is a must. Global Rescue recommends renting a satellite phone for your trip.

**"It's important that we are more aware and more vigilant and maybe change habits when traveling," says Global Rescue's Director of Security Operations Scott Hume.**

Like other travel risk firms, Global Rescue provides site and destination reports and travel assessments for its clients.

But the biggest message the firm is offering right now is simply to put more thought into preparing for a trip and ensuring your safety while abroad.

"We're not discouraging travel to Europe," Hume says. "Quite the opposite. You can't stop living life. We've had episodes like this in Europe over the course of my lifetime. Our memory is short. This is not new. Maybe the locations are morphing a bit. Maybe we haven't seen in our lifetime, attacks in Paris or Brussels. But these events are not uncommon."

Moving forward, those in the security and travel community say, if a trip to Europe still makes you feel somewhat uncomfortable, then consider other options, if possible. Particularly for leisure travelers, the point is to enjoy the experience and not spend too much time being overly stressed or concerned about what you're doing and where you're visiting.

"Travel is meant to be fun," Geronemus says. "Travelers need to be comfortable with their travel plans. If you think you would be too nervous to travel to Europe this summer, that's your decision, and there are plenty of amazing places outside of Europe, like Asia and South Africa, worthy of your travels this summer as well."

