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How to plan my trip abroad

"I read in the newspaper that you were here. What's the situation in Thailand?" asks the lady before she has even reached our FDFA stand – a common question at the holiday fairs we attended in Basel and Geneva.

Political unrest is a concern for travellers. Should they book their trip now and take advantage of the early-booking discount or wait and assess the situation? Everyone obviously has to make that decision for themselves, but we can show them how and where to find the FDFA's travel advice. We access our website on two tablets. "That's the latest technology," points out a young man appreciatively. "Can I take that with me, too?"

Travel preparation

He is, of course, not given a tablet but he does receive our travel checklist in credit-card format. Reading through it page by page, you will find information about the security situation in the travel advice section and about culture and tourist attractions in the travel guides. It will also help to ensure you submit visa applications in good time and get the vaccinations required – in short, you will be as prepared as you can be for your journey and aware of the risks abroad.

Travel preparation also includes

- Comprehensive travel insurance. Depending on the policy, this covers costs incurred in the event of illness, cancellations or rebooking, and provides support if money or identity documents are stolen or if accidents occur, etc.

■ Entering travel details into *itineris*, the FDFA's registration platform. This makes it easier for us to contact travellers in the event of an emergency. Persons registered receive an SMS text message or an email if the security situation deteriorates drastically in the region where they are staying. However, the online registration system *itineris* does not provide advance warnings about natural phenomena such as earthquakes, tsunamis and hurricanes, etc. The warnings and advice of the local authorities responsible should always be followed in such cases.

A nation that loves to travel

Keen travellers talk to us about their experiences and travel plans at the exhibitions. What the statistics tell us is confirmed here: the Swiss love to travel. The travel advice pages, containing assessments of the security situation in 176 countries and general tips for travel preparation and travelling abroad, are the FDFA's most frequently visited webpages. We constantly draw attention to important updates via Twitter, and this information can be downloaded via *itinerisApp*.

Risk of abduction

A married couple enthuse about a trip they undertook last year through Mauretania and Mali and reflect on their experience: "Apart from a flat tyre, we did not have any problems at all and got a warm reception everywhere. The FDFA exaggerates when it advises against travelling to these countries." – No, we do not exaggerate. We constantly check travel information and only advise against travel if the risk is deemed too high on the basis of the information we have.

The risk of abduction has been very high in the Sahara and bordering regions for several years now, and the situation is unpredictable. Several Westerners are currently in the hands of terrorists. Of course, not all foreigners find themselves in danger, but such situations can happen to anyone. And then what? The persons abducted can expect endless long days and weeks of physical strain and anxiety, while their family members suffer a period of agonising uncertainty. The state must begin protracted and complex negotiations with an uncertain outcome. Switzerland does not pay ransom, partly to avoid making its citizens the target of abduction and partly to prevent any strengthening of the position of terrorists.

Brochures, checklists, flyers

In addition to the travel checklist, our visitors are also given the brochure "If you're planning a trip" and the Helpline flyer with a detachable card so that they always have the helpline number and the FDFA's key contact points for travellers at hand. The flyer has been enclosed with all new Swiss passports since July 2013.

This information and these services are available to all Swiss citizens worldwide. Please consult our website and contact the embassy, consulate general or FDFA helpline in Berne if you have any questions. They will be pleased to serve you around the clock, either by telephone or in writing.

THE FDFA HOLIDAY FAIRS TEAM

SERVICES

- www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise: country-specific situation assessments and general travel advice
- www.eda.admin.ch/itineris: online registration of travel details
- *itinerisApp* for iPhone and Android: access to travel information, online registration on *itineris*, the FDFA helpline and addresses of Swiss representations abroad
- www.twitter.com/travel_edadfae: updates on travel information and holiday advice
- FDFA helpline +41 800 24-7-365 or Skype helpline-eda: consular issues of any nature
- www.helpline-eda.ch





HELPLINE FDFA

Phone from Switzerland: 0800 24-7-365
 Phone from abroad: +41 800 24-7-365
 E-Mail: helpline@eda.admin.ch
 Skype: [helpline-eda](skype:helpline-eda)



Travel advice

www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise
 Helpline DFAE: +41 (0)800 24-7-365
www.twitter.com/travel_edadfae



itineris 

Online registration for Swiss citizens travelling abroad

www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris



In the Federal Council Chamber (from left to right): Johann N. Schneider-Ammann, Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, Simonetta Sommaruga (Vice President), Swiss President Didier Burkhalter, Doris Leuthard, Ueli Maurer, Alain Berset and Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova

Important notice

Please notify your Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile telephone number(s) and/or any changes to them and register at www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletters from your representation, etc.).

The latest issue of "Swiss Review" and previous issues can be read and/or printed out at any time at www.revue.ch. "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is sent to all households of Swiss abroad who are registered with an embassy or consulate general either electronically (via email or as an iPad/Android app) or in printed format free of charge.

FEDERAL REFERENDA

Four proposals will be put to the vote on 18 May 2014:

- Federal decree of 19 September 2013 on basic medical provision (direct counterproposal to the popular initiative "Ja zur Hausarztmedizin" (Yes to family practitioners)); see also page 15
- Popular initiative of 20 April 2011 "Pädophile sollen nicht mehr mit Kindern arbeiten dürfen" (Paedophiles should no longer be permitted to work with children); see also page 16
- Popular initiative of 23 January 2012 "Für den Schutz fairer Löhne (Mindestlohn-Initiative)" (For the protection of fair wages (minimum wage initiative)); see also page 16
- Federal law of 27 September 2013 on the fund to procure the Gripen fighter jets (Gripen Fund Act); see also page 15.

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlet, committees, party information, e-voting, etc.) can be found at www.ch.ch/en/votes.

Further referendum dates in 2014: 28 September; 30 November.

POPULAR INITIATIVES

At the time of going to press, the following new federal popular initiative had been launched (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- "Für Ernährungssicherheit" (For food security) (04.08.2015)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.