Her own way – a woman's safe-travel guide

Canada
Her Own Way
A woman's safe-travel guide
travel.gc.ca

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Introduction

Women travel for countless reasons, whether to discover new frontiers, pursue business opportunities, or simply to rest and relax – not unlike men. But when it comes to health and security, and how travellers are affected by the religious and cultural beliefs of the foreign countries they visit, there's a huge difference between women and men. The truth is that women face greater obstacles, especially when travelling alone.

The Government of Canada assists thousands of Canadian women in distress abroad each year. The problems they face are diverse. Petty and violent crime, culture shock, poor sanitation, the dangers and disappointments of international cyber-dating – the challenges are many.

But so are the benefits. With careful planning, common sense, and respect for religious and societal differences, you can minimize your risks and maximize your chances of having a safe and successful trip.

The Government of Canada has developed this booklet to help inform and prepare you before you leave Canada. The booklet offers a preventive, female-friendly approach to tackling the security, cultural, health, and social concerns of women travellers. It should be read as a close companion to the safe-travel booklet Bon voyage, but… essential information for Canadian travellers.

We wish you a joyful and trouble-free journey!

Off to a safe start

Know the risks

The more you know about where you're going, the safer and happier your travels will be. Before you leave, be sure to complete a risk assessment of any country you're thinking of visiting. It will help you to choose a destination where you'll feel safe and in your comfort zone. If you doubt you can put up with the challenges and hazards of a particular country, strike it off your list.

A risk assessment should address your concerns as a female traveller, including safety and security, health conditions, the political and economic environment, local laws, customs, and cultural norms – including the role of women – in your potential host country. For example, some countries employ strict interpretations of Sharia, or Islamic law, which may have an impact on the rights and obligations of women. The fact that activities, such as wearing a bikini or having premarital sex, are legal in Canada doesn't mean they'll be so in a foreign country. Based on your research, develop a risk-management strategy outlining hazards you should be aware of and precautions you can take.

- Start by checking to see if there's a travel advisory in effect for your proposed destination and obtain information on safety and security, local laws and customs, health conditions, and entry requirements.
- For information on health conditions, consult the Public Health Agency of Canada's Travel Health website and the World Health Organization's website.
- Supplement these resources with travel books, newsletters, magazines, and websites just for women travellers. They offer a comprehensive view of the health, safety, cultural, and emotional issues experienced by women on the road.

Plan ahead

Careful preparation is your key to safe and successful travel. By planning ahead, you'll avoid hassles later. Before leaving Canada:

- Read the safe-travel booklet Bon voyage, but… essential information for Canadian travellers.
- Obtain a valid Canadian passport and an appropriate visa for every country on your itinerary. Understand the terms of each visa, as you could be arrested for violating visa conditions in some countries.
- As a precaution against loss or theft, leave copies of important travel documents with family or friends in Canada. If possible, scan all your documents and send them to yourself at an e-mail address you can access anywhere.
- Make sure you have travel health insurance that covers all medical expenses for illness or injury (including hospitalization abroad and medical evacuation), loss or theft of valuables, damage to baggage, and flight cancellations or interruptions.
- Consider taking a self-defence course for women. You'll embark on your journey with added confidence.
- Sign up for the Registration of Canadians Abroad service.
- Carry an Emergency Contact Card with the coordinates of the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate in your destination country, in case you run into trouble abroad.

Go lightly

Always travel light, if possible, to protect yourself against loss or theft of money and valuables. You'll be much less vulnerable and more independent if you're not weighed down with a lot of luggage.

- The ideal handbag or daypack is easy to carry and has zippered inner compartments for added security, a padlock on every pocket, and a sturdy shoulder strap or harnesses. The best way to carry your bag is in front of you, close to your body, where it's out of reach of wandering hands. Carry only items that are lightweight and that you can afford to lose.
- Try to have at least one hand free at all times. It may help to wear cargo pants or a vest with multiple pockets to store travel documents and gear. Be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye out for bag-snatchers and pickpockets.
- Avoid displaying expensive-looking cameras, jewellery, and other showy accessories that may mark you as a wealthy tourist.
- Beware of credit card fraud. Never leave your credit card out of sight.
- Conceal in a money belt or neck pouch any necessities that can't be easily replaced and that are crucial to your travel arrangements: your passport, airline and train tickets, credit and debit cards, traveller's cheques, cash, a copy of your insurance policy, medical prescriptions, and contact information for your doctor.
- Keep copies of all important travel documents in your suitcase, in case the originals are stolen or lost.
- Use a small wheeled suitcase or backpack for long trips, a small day pack or tote bag for shorter excursions. Keep your luggage locked at all times. Carry two sets of keys.
- Use luggage tags that hide your contact information from the inquiring eyes of thieves and con artists.
- Always pack your own luggage and never let it out of your sight while travelling. Watch out for individuals who may try to plant items in your pockets or in your luggage. Never carry anything, even an envelope, across a border or through customs for anyone else.

Crime-proof yourself

Protect yourself by knowing how to stay out of trouble.

- Be careful who you trust. Watch out for criminals – both male and female – who target women travellers. They may work individually or in teams, often posing as good Samaritans or creating distractions to steal belongings. Be wary of new "friends", including locals, fellow travellers, and even Canadians you meet abroad. Beware of the threat of getting trapped in sex or labour trafficking. Human traffickers frequently recruit foreign women through fraudulent ads for work as hostesses, models, nannies, maids, or other seemingly legitimate jobs.
- Lower your tourist profile and try not to give the impression that you're lost or vulnerable. Know where you're going, what you're doing, and how to get back. Always carry the address or a business card from your accommodations. Study a street map before going out. Avoid

opening a map in a public area or keep it hidden under a newspaper. If you get lost, try to get your bearings and ask for directions from a police officer, shopkeeper, or another woman on the street, or by finding a phone and calling your hotel or hostel.

- Use only legal and reputable taxis. Never hire a taxi if the driver approaches you in an airport arrival area. Such services are usually illegal and may be unsafe. Ask your hotel to recommend taxi services and avoid the risk of hailing an unlicensed cab on the street. Or take advantage of women-only taxis in such cities as London, Cairo, and Moscow. Whenever possible, pair up with someone you trust when travelling by taxi.
- Never hitchhike or accept rides from strangers. There's no country on earth where hitchhiking is safe, particularly for women.
- If travelling by car, always lock the doors to prevent carjackers and thieves from getting in with you. Fill up the tank when half empty to avoid running out of gas in unsafe areas. Consider carrying a mobile phone or buying a local one and make sure you have an emergency number in case you experience a mechanical breakdown or find yourself in danger. Never pick up hitchhikers. And never get out of your car if another vehicle bumps into it. Thieves sometimes fake accidents as a ruse to steal cars or the valuables inside. Instead, wait for the police to arrive.
- Leave important items in your hotel safe, avoid taking valuables to the beach or pool, and if you do, never leave them unattended while swimming. Carry only essentials, such as your cash and hotel key, in a compact waterproof container with a neck or wrist strap.
- Stay alert and aware of your surroundings. Minimize alcohol consumption and don't use, carry, or get involved with illegal drugs.
- Don't be afraid to make a scene. A loud whistle or even a healthy scream can be helpful tools to ward off an attacker, deter an intruder, or summon aid. Consider wearing a whistle as a necklace or carrying a personal security alarm that emits a shrill sound.

Preventing sexual assault

There's potential for sexual assault anywhere in the world. Taking precautions is your best defence against becoming a victim.

- Never leave food or drinks unattended or in the care of strangers. Be wary of accepting snacks, beverages, gum, or cigarettes from new acquaintances. There's always a risk of spiking, and drug-assisted rape is common worldwide. So-called "date-rape drugs" – usually prescription-strength sleeping aids – are tasteless and colourless and can leave you unconscious and defenceless. Alcohol alone is the drug most frequently used in sexual assault.
- If you begin to feel strange, sick, or intoxicated for no obvious reason, ask a friend or someone you trust to take you to a safe place. If you're alone, call the local police, a hospital, or the nearest Canadian government office abroad.
- Know the risks of ending up alone with strange men. Think twice before leaving a club or party with someone you've just met or accepting an invitation to go out with a man alone, especially in societies where dating without a chaperone present is considered taboo.
- Be wary of anyone who invades your personal space, ignores your protests, or tries to make you feel ashamed if you resist his advances.
- If you feel threatened, don't hesitate to draw attention to yourself by shouting and making a fuss.
- See Coping with sexual harassment for additional precautions you can take.

If you go alone

Travelling solo has its benefits. You get to set your own pace, have more direct contact with foreign cultures, and meet new friends more easily. But a lone female traveller may also face unwanted attention or overwhelming obstacles in some parts of the world. For example, in countries that employ a strict interpretation of Sharia law, women may not be allowed to drive cars, travel alone, or even go out in public without a male relative or a group of other women.

If you travel alone, you may want to choose countries with a more relaxed attitude towards solo female travellers, where you'll face fewer challenges. Otherwise, you may wish to team up with a travel companion – there's safety in numbers.

When travelling on your own, be sure to follow these safety measures:

- Steer clear of isolated situations that could put you at risk. On a bus or train, sit next to someone of your own sex. In a taxi, sit in the back behind the driver. Avoid travelling in train carriages where you're the only passenger. Never go walking, jogging, or sightseeing alone in secluded areas, especially at night.
- If touring solo for the day, leave a note in your room explaining where you're going. If you don't return as planned, this information could be used to track you down.
- Take extra precautions if you go out at night. Understand that, in many parts of the world, "decent" women don't go out alone after dark, and doing so could put you at risk. Tell someone where you're going and when you'll return. If dining out, choose a nearby restaurant or arrange to have a taxi pick you up and bring you back to your hotel. Consider joining a sightseeing tour if you want to experience the sights and rhythms of a foreign city at night.
- Never tell strangers where you're staying or disclose details of your travel plans to anyone you don't fully trust.

A safe haven

Finding safe accommodations is one of a woman traveller's primary goals.

- Travel early in the day, so you'll have time to find a suitable place before dark. Better still, book your lodgings in advance, especially if you're due to arrive late at night. You'll have the peace of mind of not having to search for a hotel on the shadowy streets of a foreign town.
- Make sure you feel comfortable about your accommodations and their location. Always ask to see the room before taking it. Does the door lock properly? Are there holes in the door or walls that could be used by peeping Toms? Are there fire alarms and escape routes? Does it feel safe? Don't stay anywhere unless you feel comfortable.
- Avoid ground-floor accommodations or any room that has easy access from outside, such as from a balcony or fire escape. Book a room that's close to an elevator and away from exits.
- Understand the risks of staying in low-budget accommodations, such as hostels and campsites. Never leave valuables or travel documents behind in your room and keep them close to you if you sleep in a dorm. Remember that camping solo or accepting lodgings from a stranger could be an invitation to danger.
- Even if you choose luxury accommodations, you should always be vigilant. Ensure the door of your room is locked, even when you're inside. Consider packing a rubber door wedge that can be installed on an inward-opening door for added security. Never open your door to anyone without taking precautions, such as looking through the spy hole or using the door chain. If a visitor claims to be a staff member, always ask the front desk if the person is authorized to enter your room.
- Never leave your window open, especially if your room is on the ground floor or has a balcony.
- Be aware that stairwells allow troublemakers to hide and to come and go undetected. Don't get in an elevator unless you feel safe.
- Keep your room number and location private. When checking in, write your name with only your first initial, without a title, such as Ms., Miss, or Mrs. Don't accept a room if the check-in clerk calls out your name or room number. Others within hearing distance may use this information to call you or get access to your room. Keep your key out of view to prevent anyone from noting your room number.

If the worst happens

Take the following steps if you become the victim of robbery, sexual assault, or other violent crime while abroad:

- Contact the local police immediately and ensure they file a report, even if you've only been threatened with violence. Inform consular officials at the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate. They can assist you with this process and help you find support to deal with the emotional, social, medical, and legal consequences of the crime.
- If you can't go to the police immediately, write down all the details you can remember about the crime. If possible, have photographs taken of visible injuries.
- In order to preserve evidence of a sexual assault, try not to wash, brush your teeth, or use the toilet before reporting the crime.
- Seek medical assistance, whether or not you appear to have been physically harmed. It's important to consult with a health-care professional to identify injuries and your risks of

sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.
- Make arrangements to contact family and friends back home to reassure them about your well-being.
- To help cope with the trauma, discuss the incident with family, friends, or a professional counsellor.

Emergency consular services

If you experience problems abroad, remember that Global Affairs Canada is ready to help – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For emergency help during office hours, contact the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate. After hours, contact the Emergency Watch and Response Centre in Ottawa.

While there are limits to consular assistance, some services available to women travellers include:

- Providing advice and contact information on local police and medical services to victims of robbery, sexual assault, or other violence.
- Arranging help in a medical emergency by providing you with a list of local doctors and hospitals.
- Providing you with a list of local lawyers.
- Replacing lost, stolen, damaged, or expired passports.

Stay connected

- Sign up for the Registration of Canadians Abroad service, so that Canadian Consular Services can reach and assist you in an emergency abroad or inform you of a family emergency at home. Registration is voluntary and free, and it could even save your life. What's more, the information you provide is confidential and is used in accordance with the provisions of Canada's Privacy Act.
- Plug into the female network. Connect with other women travellers through international associations and social networks. Check for local listings of women's expatriate clubs and organizations. Members of these groups can be excellent sources of information. Seek out women who've recently visited the country you're headed for. They can tell you from first-hand experience what worked for them and what you might need to be concerned about. Note their recommendations on hotels, bed and breakfasts, and restaurants. Find out if they have friends or know of organizations you could contact at your destination.
- Stay in touch with family and friends back home, especially if you're travelling solo. Whether by e-mail, social networking, phone, fax, or letter, keep them posted on where you are and where you're headed next.
- Even if you're travelling alone, it's a good idea to link up with other women along the way. They'll become your community and support system. A chat with a seatmate on a long train or plane ride may create enough trust to feel safe about sharing a taxi or becoming temporary travel mates. While enjoying the company of strangers, be careful about sharing personal information or placing undeserved trust in them.

Intercultural issues

Find your feet

While abroad, you may find it difficult to get used to losing rights and privileges taken for granted in Canada. Expectations of women in certain cultures may seem offensive and unjust.

Among the challenges women may face are a lack of access to female physicians, discriminatory treatment by local officials, and sex segregation in some countries where men and women must sit apart on public transport and use gender-specific hospitals. In Muslim societies, the place of women may depend on the interpretation of Sharia law: although women may be held in high esteem, they're still expected to be reserved, have strictly defined roles, and enjoy little freedom of movement.

While you shouldn't be forced to conform to unacceptable norms of womanhood, it's important to maintain cultural sensitivity while abroad.

- **Be prepared to adapt.** The more you adjust to different cultural norms and show sensitivity to local traditions, the richer and safer your travels will be. You'll also be treated with greater respect and allowed to pass through relatively unnoticed. By adapting how you dress and how you behave, you'll be better able to interact skilfully with the local population. For example, non-verbal communication (body language and hand gestures) considered harmless in Canada may be misinterpreted or considered offensive in foreign cultures, and public displays of affection may be strictly taboo.
- **Inform yourself.** Find out everything you can about the culture, local customs, and roles of women and men in your destination country. Seek out women who were born and raised there or who've travelled there frequently. They're perfect guides to appropriate behaviour and dress in that culture. Know what to expect and prepare for as many situations as possible.

Coping with sexual harassment

The normal and acceptable treatment of women varies widely from culture to culture. Canadian women are often uncomfortable with the conduct of local men in some countries, where whistling, hissing, catcalls, leering, stalking, voyeurism, groping, pinching, and indiscreet comments are not considered harassment but acceptable forms of male attention. Partly due to the widespread misconception that Western women are flirtatious and promiscuous, a Canadian female may be seen as fair game, particularly if she looks different from the local women and is travelling alone.

The following strategies will help you deal with sexual harassment.

- **Behave confidently.** Act as if you know exactly where you're going and what you're doing, even if you're lost. At the same time, maintain a formal demeanour. In some cultures, being outgoing or friendly – or simply smiling or initiating a conversation – may be interpreted as flirting or a sexual invitation. If a man tries to talk to you, don't feel pressured to respond. If someone makes you uncomfortable, keep your composure and remove yourself from the situation at once.
- **Avoid eye contact.** In some cultures, meeting a man's gaze may suggest that you want his company. A simple solution is to wear dark glasses in public places.
- **Take your cue from the local women.** If they don't sit in cafés or parks alone or wear tank tops or miniskirts, neither should you. Avoid wearing form-fitting clothing that may be considered provocative. If you're fair-haired in a country where most women are dark-haired, you may attract unwanted attention. Consider wearing a headscarf or hat.
- **Wear a (fake) wedding ring.** Also carry a photo of your husband (or an imaginary one), which you can show to persistent suitors. Being seen as married will lower your profile and stave off uninvited advances.
- **Be vigilant when travelling on public transport.** Crowded buses and trains can be hot spots for anti-social behaviour. Some men may exploit the opportunity to harass female passengers. If you're targeted, make a fuss. Point at the offender and chastise him in a loud voice. He'll probably slink away. To avoid such advances, consider choosing reserved seating or insist on sitting next to another woman. Or avail yourself of female-only sections on buses or passenger cars on subways and trains in such cities as Tokyo, Mumbai, Mexico City, Jakarta, and Rio de Janeiro.

Cushioning culture shock

Many people experience feelings of dislocation and unease while abroad, particularly during extended contact with a foreign culture. The impacts of culture shock range from mild irritability to a severe sense of alienation, which could affect your mental health. One of the best survival strategies is to make a conscious effort to feel more at home in your new surroundings.

Strictly business

Canadian women who travel abroad for professional purposes will find their success increases in proportion to their knowledge of the cultural do's and taboos of the foreign workplace.

- Realize that, in many parts of the world, the main role of women is in the home, and the concept of a career woman is highly unusual.
- Get thoroughly acquainted with your destination country's customs and business protocol, especially in cultures where women don't generally hold key corporate positions.
- Always meet your business contacts in the lobby of your hotel. Avoid giving out your room number.
- Note that, in some societies, it is forbidden for a woman to touch a man in public. When in doubt, wait for the man to initiate handshaking.

- Dress appropriately. If local women don't wear slacks to the office, neither should you. Wear shoes that allow you to stand for long periods and to move quickly.
- Be aware that, in some cultures, even though you do business with men in the daytime, women may be required to sit separately for the evening meal. Men may also steer clear of you in countries where unrelated persons of the opposite sex aren't normally left alone together.
- Understand that businessmen in certain societies may think it's okay to flirt with or proposition you. A firm "no" is appropriate.

What to wear

The rules of dressing for success vary hugely from culture to culture. They're often based on age-old religious and moral beliefs. Defying these customs may be strictly forbidden in some societies and put you at risk.

- Find out what women wear in your host country before you arrive. Pack a suitable wardrobe based on your research.
- Err on the side of modesty – or dress conservatively – if you want to blend in. The dress code is especially strict in some male-dominated societies, where bare shoulders, short pants, mini skirts, and other revealing attire may cause offence. A shawl can be a priceless part of your wardrobe. So can a long skirt: it's not only modest but also convenient if you ever need to use a squat toilet!
- Be prepared to cover your entire body, with the possible exception of your hands and face, in certain Middle Eastern countries. Bring loose, linen trousers, a long-sleeved tunic, plus any mandatory head or face covering, such as a hijab, chador, or niqab. Pack both sandals and shoes in case your feet must be covered.
- Dress appropriately when visiting any religious site. Bring a scarf or shawl in case you must cover your head, shoulders, or arms. Never wear shoes in a Muslim mosque or in a Buddhist or Hindu temple.
- Know the local laws regarding nude or topless bathing before you disrobe, even on the most secluded beach.

In Saudi Arabia, a woman must wear an abaya (a long black cloak that covers the body from the shoulders to the toes). A scarf should be carried at all times to cover the head when requested. In addition, a woman is not allowed to drive a motor vehicle or ride a bicycle. She must have a male driver.

Medical matters

Take your health with you

Whether you're a breastfeeding mother, a business executive, or a seasoned adventuress, you'll need to deal with unique female health issues on the road.

- Consult our free booklet Well on your way: a Canadian's guide to healthy travel abroad for advice on the importance of having an individual health assessment by your doctor or at a travel health clinic; obtaining travel health insurance; travelling with prescription medications; immunizations; tropical diseases; and other vital travel health topics
- Carry a supply of condoms to guard against unwanted pregnancy and to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases, even if you don't expect to meet a new partner. Note that

condoms may be unavailable in your destination country.

- Pack an adequate supply of feminine hygiene products, such as tampons and sanitary napkins. They may be scarce in some parts of the world. In case you need to use a squat toilet without running water, it’s wise to bring antibacterial hand sanitizer as well as extra tissue paper, which may be in short supply outside hotels.
- If you’re prone to yeast infections, note that they’re more likely to occur in warm, humid climates. A preventive measure is to wear loose-fitting cotton underwear as well as skirts rather than pants. Bring appropriate medication to treat the infection, as it may be unavailable in certain countries.
- Help reduce your chances of suffering from cystitis – an infection of the urinary tract and bladder – by drinking plenty of purified water, especially in hotter environments.
- If you’re experiencing the hot flashes of menopause, pack a “layered” wardrobe that can be adjusted to help control your fluctuating body temperature.
- Remember to bring extra eyeglasses or contact lenses in case of breakage or loss.

Advice for expectant mothers

- If you’re planning to travel while pregnant – especially by air –be sure to see your doctor well in advance.
- Make sure your travel health insurance covers pregnancy-related conditions, pre-term and full-term birth, and neonatal care.
- Check airline rules for pregnant passengers before booking a flight. In Canada, airlines will allow you to fly up to the 35th week of pregnancy, provided you’re healthy and have no history of premature labour. Regulations vary abroad. You may need a letter from your doctor verifying the stage of your pregnancy.
- Request an aisle seat and try to stand up, walk, or stretch your legs regularly during longer flights. Pregnant women have a heightened risk of blood clots.
- Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration resulting from low humidity in the aircraft cabin environment.
- Build in extra rest stops during long trips to allow your body to recover from the added exertion of travelling.
- Avoid malarial zones, if possible. Even when taking anti-malarial drugs, pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to the illness, which tends to affect them more severely.
- Avoid using iodine to purify water. It could harm the fetal thyroid gland.
- Steer clear of high-altitude destinations, where oxygen to the fetus may be reduced, especially during the first trimester.
- If you’re going to give birth outside Canada, identify beforehand a local hospital or birthing facility that is up to Canadian standards, if possible. Bring plenty of diapers, since they may be unavailable in your host country. If you plan to breastfeed, follow the example of local women, as practices vary from culture to culture. When in doubt, opt to breastfeed in private.
- For information on the citizenship of children born to Canadian parents abroad, see our FAQ on birth abroad.
- For more information for expectant mothers, see our page travelling while pregnant.

Going abroad with children?

Consult our travelling with children fact sheet (including a consent letter template) and the children and travel section of our website.

Overseas relationships

The promises and perils of international romance

While abroad, a foreign affair with a fairytale ending may be more than a flight of the imagination, but it may also be fraught with danger and disappointment. Consular Services frequently assists Canadian women who experience problems in overseas relationships, ranging from cyber-dating scams to domestic abuse to child custody disputes.

Proceed with caution if you’re going abroad to meet a suitor, especially if the relationship began in the ambiguous realm of cyberspace.

- Before leaving Canada, learn about the laws, customs, and values of your potential partner’s country regarding relationships and marriage. How that country views women’s rights, premarital sex, property, inheritance, divorce, alimony, and child support and custody may be totally different from what you’re used to. Learn if the freedoms you enjoy in Canada exist in the culture you’re marrying into. In many countries, a husband has the right to impose travel restrictions on his wife and children, preventing their return to Canada. Failure to find out in advance could result in huge problems later on.
- Never quit your job, give up your home, or sell all your belongings in the hope of a union that may never happen or that you may later regret.
- If meeting your possible partner for the first time, be sure to do so in a public place, such as a restaurant or café. As an added precaution, leave a note in your room stating where and with whom the meeting will take place.
- Take time to get to know the man and his family. Don’t be rushed into marriage. Make your decision only after returning to Canada.
- Don’t divulge information about personal finances or how to access your bank accounts.
- Have an exit strategy. Safeguard a return airline ticket or sufficient funds to get back to Canada and – most importantly – your Canadian passport.
- If you’re being pressured into marriage through kidnapping, harassment, emotional blackmail, or any other threat, understand that forced marriage constitutes a human-rights violation under international law. If you’re a victim of domestic abuse, such as physical violence, involuntary confinement, or the withholding of your passport and finances, inform the local authorities. For further assistance, or if you need help returning to Canada, contact the nearest Canadian consulate or embassy or the Emergency Watch and Response Centre Ottawa. Consular officials can provide you with a list of local lawyers, shelters, and social services.
- For more information, see our FAQ on Marriage overseas.

Travelling with a same-sex partner

While same-sex marriages are legal in Canada, they’re not recognized in most other countries. You and your partner may be refused entry into a foreign country if you present yourselves as a same-sex couple.

Moreover, homosexual or lesbian activity is a criminal offence in certain countries, and the threat of discrimination or punishment could affect your activities. For more, consult our Travel Advice and Advisories or your destination country’s embassy or consulate in Canada.

Don’t get scammed

Women romantically involved with overseas suitors are sometimes victims of crime or fraud. Typical cases include online dating scams, extortion by in-laws or criminal gangs abroad, and appeals to send large sums of money to a foreign “fiancé” to help bring him to Canada. Some women who travel to meet possible partners have even been kidnapped and held for ransom. Certain would-be immigrants consider marriage to a Canadian citizen to be their ticket to a Canadian visa. They typically bolt when they arrive on our shores. Such scams have nothing to do with romance and everything to do with taking advantage of vulnerable women.

- Beware of those who use international cyber-dating for malicious purposes. It’s next to impossible to know if the person who’s wooing you online is actually unmarried and seeking a mate, to say nothing of his moral character or emotional stability. It’s always best to move forward slowly. If an online romance sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.
- Be cautious about divulging personal information to anyone you’re networking with. It could be used to steal your identity, often in order to access credit, purchase property, make false claims for medical services, or obtain other benefits in your name.
- If you’re a victim of marital crime or fraud, you should hire a lawyer with expertise in matrimonial law. While the Government of Canada has no jurisdiction in private legal matters and cannot influence legal proceedings in a foreign jurisdiction, consular officials at the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate can provide you with a list of legal representatives in the country concerned.
- For more information on how to protect yourself from international scams, see the website of the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre.

Parting words

By now, you know that international travel means not only rewards but also risks. Still, we trust that this booklet will broaden, not limit, your spirit of adventure. With increased awareness, thorough preparation, and a measure of caution, you can travel almost anywhere bravely and responsibly.

May your path be safe, your burden light, and the benefits of your journey bountiful!

Consular services

Consular Services website
www.travel.gc.ca

General
Tel.: **1-800-267-6788** (in Canada and the U.S.) or **613-944-6788**
TTY: (For persons with a hearing loss.) **1-800-394-3472** (in Canada and the U.S.) or **613-944-1310**
E-mail: travel@international.gc.ca

Emergencies
Tel.: **613-996-8885** (call collect from abroad where available)
E-mail: sos@international.gc.ca

Alcohol, Drugs and Travel
Visit our page on alcohol, drugs and travel.

Publications (free)
Access our smart-travel publications or order them by calling 1-800-267-8376 (in Canada) or 613-944-4000.

Travel Advice and Advisories
Our Ttravel advice and advisories provide vital information on safety and security, local laws and customs, health conditions, and entry requirements for approximately 200 travel destinations. This information is also available by phone: 1-800-267-6788 (in Canada and the U.S.) or 613-944-6788.

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