

10 tips: Know your way around travel insurance

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Travel insurance is becoming increasingly popular, but in many cases it simply duplicates coverage you already have. The following tips can help you determine what kind of travel coverage, if any, is right for you.

1 Familiarize yourself with what's out there. Travel insurance can include trip cancellation, trip interruption, accidental death or dismemberment, medical and dental care, transportation to medical facilities, loss of luggage or personal possessions, and protection against the bankruptcy or default of your cruise line or tour operator.

2 Determine whether you're already covered. Many homeowners' and renters' policies provide coverage for theft and other losses away from home. Your medical and auto insurance may be valid in other countries. And airlines must reimburse you if they lose your bags.

3 Remember your credit cards and auto club membership. Check to see what travel protection you have from your credit cards. The American Express Platinum Card gives generous accidental death and dismemberment coverage, and insurance for car rental loss and damage.

4 Buy through a third-party insurer. Travel agents, tour operators and cruise lines sell travel insurance, but your safest bet is to obtain coverage through an established insurance company. You can compare rates at InsureMyTrip.com (www.insuremytrip.com).

5 Ask the right questions. Ask insurers: Are you licensed by the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation (www.floir.com)? What disasters are covered? What restrictions apply? How does the reimbursement get determined?

6 Know the drill with trip-cancellation coverage. In the case of natural disasters and other dramatic events beyond a travel provider's control, you're likely to get a refund if your trip gets canceled.

7 Avoid flight insurance sold in vending machines. Have you ever spotted such offers in airports? They're situated there to play on people's fear of flying, but remember: The least expensive way to insure your life is through a term life insurance policy. And your credit card may provide such coverage.

8 Understand cancellation waivers. Many cruise and tour operators offer these waivers for about \$40 to \$60 in case you have to cancel your trip. The waivers provide some protection, but they often have many restrictions and are not regulated by the state Office of Insurance Regulation.

9 Consider extra coverage. If you must travel with expensive electronic equipment, sporting gear or jewelry, you could consider a floater for your existing homeowners' or renters' policy.

10 Recognize the value of emergency medical assistance coverage. This would cover you if you must be airlifted off a mountain, receive prolonged treatment in a foreign hospital or be flown home because of serious sickness or injury. Before you buy, find out whether your health insurer would cover you overseas and pay for your flight home if an emergency strikes. If you have Medicare, this coverage could be valuable because you're probably not covered outside the United States.

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