

Avoiding & Preventing Car Crashes

Road crashes kill 1.2 million people each year and injure or disable 50 million more.

In some countries 1 out of 10 hospital beds is occupied by the victim of a car crash.

Road crashes are far and away the commonest cause of death in travellers. In some countries the risk of being in an accident is between 20 and 30 times greater than in England. In developed countries it is mainly drivers who get killed, but in developing countries nearly as many pedestrians are killed as drivers and vehicle occupants.

There is a great deal you can do to reduce the risk of being hurt or killed in a road crash or of avoiding hurting or killing others.

Many seasoned travellers develop the attitude that the suggestions below are often not practicable and that living in a different culture means you have to change your expectations rather than act like a fussy foreigner. That attitude if anything increases the danger.

How to Prevent Road Accidents

- Fit and wear seat belts to both front **AND** rear seats, and ensure that all, including children, use them. Unstrapped back-seat passengers can kill those in the front seat. Wearing seat belts, even for the shortest journeys, is probably the single most important health precaution you can take when overseas (or at home).
- Keep your vehicle in good condition by regular servicing, and make sure tyres are adequate, and brakes and lights working properly.
- Make sure any driver you employ, personally or for a project, is both licensed and competent to drive.
- Try to avoid driving when tired, feverish, jet-lagged or for prolonged periods, or overnight or without a co-driver. 4 hours and preferably 2 should be the maximum without a break or change of driver.
- Keep well hydrated.
- Never drink or take recreational drugs and then drive, or drive when taking medicines that make you drowsy.
- Leave plenty of time for journeys so you are not in a hurry.
- Don't use mobile (cell) phones or 2 way radios when driving, or fiddle with other equipment.
- Choose drivers, taxis and rickshaws with care, and, as far as your ingenuity allows, make sure that lights, tyres and brakes are in good order before setting out. Ensure your driver is alert and not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. 'Close-face bargaining' can enable you to observe dilated pupils, and smell breath.
- When riding as a passenger in the front seat be alert to the care being taken by the driver, being prepared when essential to make comments, take hold of the steering wheel if an avoidable crash is impending or the driver is failing to concentrate on mountain roads. Also be aware if the driver is falling off to sleep.

- Carry in the vehicle a first-aid kit, torch and leather gloves for pulling victims free. Also food, fluid, and blankets if going on longer journeys, and a warning triangle.
- Motorcyclists should wear crash helmets (or change to a safer form of transport), even for the shortest journeys. Also ensure you are capable of riding a motor bike and have experience of doing so, don't just jump on one and go.
- When crossing the road remember the direction of traffic flow. Take special care of children if visiting a city after living in a rural area

Further Information

These subjects are so important there is a special booklet (20 easy-to-read-pages) on how individuals can help to prevent crashes and accidents, and how organisations can draw up guidelines to make them less likely. There is also a fact sheet available on the [Travel Health Advice Centre](#) called 'Preventing Accidents' which you should read before you travel.

More information can be found in: 'The Traveller's Good Health Guide', Ted Lankester; 3rd Edition 2006.



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