



When Disaster Strikes Overseas Disasters: the Immediate Aftermath

Members of Disaster Action (DA), all of whom have been directly affected by disasters, have written this checklist for those whose friends and family may be missing in a disaster outside the UK. Every disaster is unique, but our aim is to suggest what you could do in the immediate aftermath. You may not feel able to do all this yourself. If not, try to get someone close to the family to do so.

Advice on what you need to do before travelling is available from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) website. Help may also be available from an airline, tour operator or, if the missing person(s) was travelling on business, from their company. General information on the disaster is likely to be available through Internet news services. See also DA leaflet *A Disaster Overseas*.

The British Red Cross provides a tracing and messaging service to help people find missing relatives abroad, through www.redcross.org.uk/trace.

When you believe someone may be missing overseas

Try to:

- Establish their last known location
- Call their mobile phone
- Contact their hotel
- Call the mobile phones of friends who may be with them
- Contact friends and family in the UK to check if they have heard from them.

If you still cannot locate them

The FCO may issue an emergency number, advertised through the media. Otherwise, see FCO contact details below. Alternatively, any airline/tour operator affected may set up an emergency number. Try to have the following information ready before you call:

- Details of their travel itinerary (flights, hotel and tour operator) if relevant
- Full names, address and date of birth for those missing
- Photocopy of their passport if possible
- Name of their travel insurance company if known
- Keep trying the emergency telephone number – it is likely to be very busy. When you do get through, the operator is unlikely to have specific information about the person you are calling about at that time. They will record the details you give to assist in the process of identifying those who are likely to be involved in the incident
- If the FCO is involved, you can also use the online ‘missing persons’ form on the FCO website, which will be set up and publicised through the media by the FCO.
- **NB: Call the emergency number back via the FCO’s online form if you hear from those you are concerned about. This will help those who are still missing and their families.**

Credit and bank cards

If you know what credit and bank cards they hold:

- Contact the card companies to see if they can confirm recent use and the location. Explain your circumstances, but remember that Data Protection rules restrict what can be disclosed. They can advise you of the procedures to follow.

Preparing to Travel to the Disaster Site

You may wish to travel to the site; if so, seek advice on issues such as whether it is safe to do so and the conditions you may encounter before making your decision. If you do decide to go, see the checklist below:

- It is best **not to travel alone** – take someone with you if possible
- Check that your **passport is valid and its expiry date** – some countries require six months validity for entry
- Check if a **visa** is required
- **Book travel** through the missing person's(s) travel company (if relevant)
- Tell the FCO if you are happy for your **name and contact details to be given to other families**
- Obtain the **British Embassy/High Commission/Consulate contact details** for where you are going from the FCO website
- Check **FCO Travel Advice** for the country you are travelling to (www.fco.gov.uk)
- Check **weather at destination** and pack accordingly for 4/5 days
- Arrange **travel insurance** for yourself and anyone accompanying you
- Agree with family and friends one person to be the **single point of contact** in UK
- Get the **most recent photograph** of the missing person(s) and make multiple copies (height and body size should be clear - no sunglasses)
- Prepare a list of any **special identifying features** (scars, tattoos, piercings, birthmarks)
- Obtain their **dental records/X-rays** if possible
- Photocopy of **their passport**
- Photocopy/details of **their travel documents**
- Copy of **their insurance details**
- Ask their insurers **what will be paid for** (e.g. flights, hotel, meals, hotel phone, taxis)
- **Charge your mobile**. Pack the **charger** and **power converter** (remember it costs *you* to receive calls overseas – much cheaper to text. Travel insurers may be less likely to pay mobile than hotel phone bills). Cheap phone cards are available in some countries
- Get **foreign currency** for destination
- Tell your **credit card company** where you are going and check your card has capacity.

When you arrive at your destination

- Contact the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate for latest information
- Call your UK contact with your hotel phone number and room number
- Agree set times for daily contact (bear in mind time differences)
- Get in touch with relevant local tour operator if appropriate
- Keep receipts for everything (for insurance reimbursement)
- Drink lots of water in hot countries and try to eat healthily for energy.

Disaster Action would like to thank all those who contributed to the writing of this leaflet.