

A quick health and safety checklist for Filipino travelers

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With the increasing popularity and accessibility of travel here and abroad, more Filipinos are packing their bags and going to places they've never gone before. There are travel medicine specialists who cater to the specific health concerns of travelers, including vaccinations, infectious diseases and high-altitude physiology. However, some health and safety tips can be given by any physician to prospective travelers.

Before the trip

1. Research your destination. Consider climate (or weather), altitude and security situation when packing. Find out if the area is prone to natural disasters. The Philippines, in particular, is often visited upon by typhoons and earthquakes. Pay attention to announcements by authorities. In addition to smartphones, consider bringing with you a radio transmitter for quick access to information.

2. Get travel health insurance. Keep in mind that certain countries, such as Schengen member states (in Europe), may have specific health insurance requirements.

3. Secure important documents. Place copies of your passport and travel papers, including your health insurance policy and claim forms, in each travel bag. Scan these documents and email them to yourself. Leave extra copies with



family or friends back home, in case you lose all your copies during a natural disaster and have no internet access.

Travel health kit: basic checklist

For your travel health kit, think about where you are going, what you will be doing, how long you will be traveling, and whether you will have access to health supplies at your destination. Items that most travelers should have in their kits include:

- Medications and supplies for pre-existing conditions, such as insulin and glucometer supplies for diabetics. For maintenance medications, pack enough for the duration of the trip plus a few extra days, in case of delays. Carry medications in their original containers. Bring copies of all prescriptions.

- Over-the-counter medications for:

- Allergies
- Constipation
- Cough
- Diarrhea (including ORS packets)

- Fever/pain
- Gastritis/heartburn
- Motion sickness
- Nasal congestion

- Skin treatments:
 - 1% hydrocortisone cream
 - Aloe gel (for sunburns)
 - Antibacterial ointment/cream
 - Antifungal ointment/cream

- First aid supplies:
 - First aid quick reference card
 - Antiseptic wound cleanser
 - Cotton swabs
 - Gauze
 - Adhesive bandages
 - Adhesive tape
 - Scissors
 - Moleskin (for blisters)
 - Elastic/compression bandage

- Others:
 - Insect repellent
 - Sunscreen
 - Alcohol
 - Digital thermometer

A travel health kit is only useful if it is easily accessible -- there is no point in assembling a complete, well-stocked kit only to leave it behind in the hotel room because it is too heavy to carry around. Experts suggest bringing a small, portable kit at all times in your carry-on lug-

gage and day bag; among others, emergency medications such as epinephrine auto-injectors should go into this kit. Meanwhile, a slightly larger kit can be stored in your check-in baggage and hotel room and used to replenish the smaller kit as needed.

Surviving disasters during travel

Common sense, presence of mind, and some basic safety precautions can help travelers deal with disasters and other unexpected events while traveling.

- Acquaint yourself with your surroundings. Find two ways to get out of your hotel room. Locate the nearest fire exit. Learn about evacuation routes in disaster-prone areas. Carry hard copies of a city map at all times.

- Identify safe places where you and your family can meet up if you get separated.

- Keep a hard copy of important phone numbers – this will be helpful to you if your phone runs out of battery, or to rescuers if you are injured. In both your phone and hard copy, write “ICE” (“in case of emergency”) before the names of people who should be contacted in case of an emergency involving you.

- Follow instructions from local authorities. Find out how to contact your nearest embassy/consulate and get in touch with them if necessary.

Hardly anybody ever plans on getting sick or caught in a calamity, but having a plan to deal with them can spell the difference between ultimate disaster and living to travel another day. 🌐