

TRAVEL INSURANCE PITFALLS

If you're going to read just one page in this website, this should be it. No matter what type of travel insurance policy you plan to take out, or which provider you get it from, follow the advice here and you'll avoid the most common and potentially expensive travel insurance pitfalls.

As with all insurance policies, you are unable to insure for an event or incident after it has happened. Therefore, customers looking to buy travel insurance during the recent airport disruptions would not be covered for travel delay or missed departure arising from the volcanic ash as they were trying to buy cover in the knowledge that there was a problem. This highlights the importance of buying travel insurance as soon as you book your holiday or flight.

Some of these tips might seem obvious or simple, but it's not a bad idea to have a checklist as you have plenty of other things to think about if you're going on holiday, and probably don't want to spend too much time choosing travel insurance.

Travel Insurance Checklist

You DON'T have to buy travel insurance from your travel agent

As much as they'll tell you it's a good idea, you can always find a better deal than what your travel agent will offer. And, it isn't any easier to claim on your insurance if you've booked your insurance and holiday together, you'll still be dealing with a separate company.

Use a regulated travel insurance provider

It's simple, if you want to make a complaint and the travel insurance provider you took out a policy with isn't registered with the Financial Regulator, you don't really have a leg to stand on. As a consumer, you can choose to use the services of any company you like, but make sure the one you use is regulated. It makes it more likely that they're trustworthy in the first place and if they're not, you'll have the very mighty clout of the Financial Regulator behind you. You can check whether a company is registered on the Financial Regulator's website.

Employer provided travel insurance

Some people have travel insurance provided as a benefit by their employer. If you're lucky enough to be one of those people, don't forget about it and buy a travel insurance policy. If you do have this employee benefit, it is still important to check that the policy provides adequate cover.

Read the paperwork

It's boring, the print is deliberately so small that it makes your eyes hurt after the third sentence, but you must read your travel insurance policy thoroughly before deciding if you want to sign it or not. And, if you have any questions, ask! It's the insurance provider's duty to ensure you understand their product, or at least they must answer your questions. Insurance documents are filled with jargon so don't be afraid to ask what something means.

Pre-existing medical conditions

A pre-existing medical condition can cause travel insurance premiums to sky-rocket, so while it can be

tempting to lie, if you fail to mention something relevant, you'll invalidate your policy. This point demonstrates how important it is to shop around different insurance providers to ensure you get the very best deal and have adequate cover for all your requirements.

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

As an Irish citizen, you can save money, time and hassle by carrying a European Health Insurance Card with you on holiday in the EU. This is NOT a replacement for having comprehensive travel insurance. The EHIC will enable you to claim medical treatment to same level as you would in Ireland, when you are in another EU country. It will not cover the costs of returning home following an accident or illness (otherwise known as repatriation).

Some insurance providers will waive the excess on a travel insurance policy when claiming for illness, if the customer has a EHIC. Also, if you require basic medical treatment abroad, that doesn't involve expensive repatriation, you could avoid making a claim and therefore avoid paying an excess.

With an estimated 50% of travellers falling ill while on holiday, travelling with both an EHIC and travel insurance is by far the safest option.

Types of travel insurance

Before taking out any insurance policy, read the travel insurance checklist above.

Single trip travel insurance

A Single trip holiday cover is like pay-as-you-go insurance - literally! A policy is taken out specifically to cover entire duration of the trip. As with all travel insurance, it is vital to check what you are covered for to make sure it's suitable for your requirements.

Multi-trip/Annual travel insurance

If you go on holiday more than once a year, even if it's just twice, taking out a multi-trip or annual policy could save you money. There are usually some restrictions on how often, or for how long you are covered for.

Check to see if there is a limit on how many trips you can go on and the duration for which you will be covered. Some policies won't be valid on holidays over a certain duration. So, if you plan to take two or three long holidays in a year, get a policy that will cover you for this.

As with all travel insurance policies, there are important things to consider before you commit to one policy or provider.

Winter sports travel insurance

Winter sports holidays are a fantastic, adventure filled thrill seekers dream adventure. But adventurers more than most need to ensure they have good travel insurance, that way even if you have an accident on the slopes, you won't have a financial nightmare to deal with.

All winter sports travel insurance policies are different so always, always the small print to guarantee you're covered for the things you want to do. If you want to go off-piste, check your policies cover this because not all of them do.

Most people who are taking a winter sports holiday worry most about having an accident. While this might not happen, it's essential to be prepared. Simply having medical cover might not be enough; would you want to claim back any unused lift passes, equipment hire or lessons? If you would, look for this when you're shopping for travel insurance.

Extended holiday/Long stay travel insurance

Long stay travel insurance will cover you for accidents, lost or stolen possessions, travel delays or cancellations (vital if your trip includes several plane journeys).

It's a given that the longer your holiday, the more chance something will happen and having a good insurance policy means you can sort things out quickly and not incur costs (apart from the excess). That way you can get back to enjoying yourself and have peace of mind throughout your trip.

Backpacker travel insurance

Gap years are on the up. In recent decades backpacking has become a popular option for school leavers, people taking a career break and even retirees. The recession has reportedly pushed that number even higher with redundancy and a gloomy job market making people see a year long adventure abroad as a far better choice.

Gap years often take people to far flung destinations not found on most tourist trails. If you're going to a less developed country then it's likely that there won't be a reciprocal health arrangement like you'll find in the EU and Australia for example. That makes getting good travel insurance that covers all the places you'll visit and things you're likely to do.

Some backpacker policies are only available for people under a certain age, usually mid 30s and below..

Over 65s' travel insurance

It hardly seems fair, but travel insurance for older people invariably costs more. Most regular travel insurance policies are only valid for people over a certain age.

It is extremely important to declare any pre-existing medical conditions at the time of taking out your policy. If you do need to make a claim due to a medical condition you failed to mention, you won't be covered. Even in countries where there is a reciprocal health arrangement for Irish citizens, like the EU, other expenses like rearranging travel and accompanied journeys would have to be met by you.