



# Afghanistan

## Afghanistan overall

This Advice is current for Monday, 08 September 2008.

Be alert to own security	Exercise caution	High degree of caution	Reconsider your need to travel	<b>Do not travel</b>
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This advice has been reviewed and reissued. It contains new information in the Summary and under Safety and Security: Terrorism (terrorists may be targeting journalists). The overall level of the advice has not changed.

## Summary

- **We strongly advise you not to travel to Afghanistan because of the extremely dangerous security situation and the very high threat of terrorist attack.**
- **If you are in Afghanistan, you should consider leaving. Australians who decide to remain in Afghanistan should ensure that they have personal security measures in place.**
- **There have been an increase in insurgent activity in the Kabul area and heightened security concerns following a series of attacks in August 2008.**
- **Serious terrorist incidents, including suicide bombings and the detonation of improvised explosive devices, occur regularly in Afghanistan, including in Kabul and Kandahar. Further attacks are expected.**
- **The Afghan Government has named a number of potential terrorist targets facing heightened threat of attack. See the [Terrorism](#) section for details.**
- **We continue to receive a stream of reporting indicating that terrorists are planning attacks against a range of targets including places frequented by foreigners. These reports include threats against identifiably Western institutions, organisations and individuals and information about a potentially heightened threat of attack on days of national significance. Possible terrorist targets include commercial and public areas such as hotels, restaurants, clubs, marketplaces and Kabul airport and non-governmental organisation (NGO) premises. Multinational forces, multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, Western embassies and Afghan government buildings and political figures are also targets for attack.**
- **Credible reports suggest terrorists may be targeting journalists, including Australians, in Afghanistan. We continue to advise Australians not to travel to Afghanistan. If you are in Afghanistan, you should consider departing.**
- **In January 2008, terrorists attacked the Serena Hotel in Kabul. Credible reporting indicates there is a renewed and ongoing terrorist threat to the Serena Hotel. Australians are strongly advised to continue to avoid the Serena Hotel and its surrounds at this time. Unconfirmed sources have indicated that terrorists are planning to target the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. Recent credible information indicates that terrorists may be planning to attack another major hotel in Kabul.**
- **We continue to receive a stream of credible reporting indicating that terrorists are planning attacks along roads in and around Kabul. You should avoid non-essential road travel in Kabul City and avoid travelling on Jalalabad and Airport (Great Massoud) roads due to the very high threat of terrorist attack. Australian government officials are advised not to travel on Jalalabad and Airport roads unless essential.**
- **Due to a deterioration in security in the provinces surrounding Kabul, travel by road from Kabul by foreigners, including Australians, has been restricted by the Afghan**

from Kabul by foreigners, including Australians, has been restricted by the Afghan government to those with armed security. You should only travel in secure transport with close protection, using reputable local drivers and guides.

- There is a continuing high threat of kidnapping against Westerners, including journalists and those working for NGOs and international organisations. During 2007, there were more than 160 incidents of kidnap in Afghanistan. Many involved foreign nationals. Westerners are expected to continue to be targeted.
- Unexploded landmines and other ordnance are a danger throughout Afghanistan.
- Demonstrations resulting in deaths and injuries have occurred in Kabul. You should avoid demonstrations, public gatherings and minor disputes as they could escalate and turn violent.
- Security arrangements for Australian Embassy staff in Kabul are at a high level at all times and staff have been instructed to avoid all non-essential local movement at this time. The Embassy has been closed to the public since October 2007 due to security concerns. The provision of consular services to Australians in Afghanistan may be severely restricted due to the safety and security environment. See [Where to Get Help](#) for further information.
- We strongly recommend that you register your travel and contact details with us, so we can contact you in an emergency.
- Be a smart traveller. Before heading overseas:
  - organise comprehensive [travel insurance](#) and check what circumstances and activities are not covered by your policy
  - subscribe to this travel advice to receive free email updates each time it's reissued.

## Safety and Security

### Terrorism

Terrorism is a threat throughout the world. You can find more information about this threat in our [General Advice to Australian Travellers](#).

We strongly advise you not to travel to Afghanistan because of the extremely dangerous security situation and the very high threat of terrorist attack. If you are in Afghanistan you should consider leaving. Australians who decide to remain in Afghanistan should ensure that they have personal security measures in place.

There have been an increase in insurgent activity in the Kabul area and heightened security concerns following a series of attacks in August 2008.

Credible reports suggest terrorists may be targeting journalists, including Australians, in Afghanistan. We continue to advise Australians not to travel to Afghanistan. If you are in Afghanistan, you should consider departing.

On 19 August 2008, a Taliban ambush 50km east of Kabul killed 10 French soldiers in one of a recent series of deadly attacks near the Afghan capital. Also in August, three aid workers and their driver were killed when their two-car convoy was fired on south of Kabul, and a roadside bomb planted on the city's outskirts hit an international convoy, killing a soldier and injuring three others.

More than 40 people were killed and more than 140 others injured when a suicide car bomb exploded outside the Indian Embassy in Kabul in July 2008. Three people were killed and 12 injured during an attack on the annual Victory Day parade attended by Afghan President Hamid Karzai in the capital in

attack on the annual victory Day parade attended by Afghan President Hamid Karzai in the capital in April 2008. The security situation remains uncertain at this time. You should monitor local information sources for details about the safety and security environment.

A warden message issued by the United States Embassy notes the embassy continues to receive credible information that insurgents intend to increase their terrorist activities targeting Afghan government officials and coalition personnel in greater Kabul.

**Military operations:** An international coalition has been conducting a military campaign to restore stability to Afghanistan since October 2001 against al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives. The security situation throughout Afghanistan, particularly in the south of the country, remains extremely dangerous.

There is a high threat to Westerners from terrorist and criminal violence, including suicide bombings and kidnappings.

Afghanistan is not safe for tourism.

**Terrorist targets:** We continue to receive a stream of reporting indicating that terrorists are planning attacks against a range of targets including places frequented by foreigners. These reports include threats against identifiably Western institutions, organisations and individuals and information about a potentially heightened threat of attack on days of national significance. Some attacks have used multiple, consecutive explosions.

The Afghani Government has named a number of potential terrorist targets. These include but are not limited to: embassies and aid agencies run by foreign governments; the Serena, Intercontinental and Safi Landmark hotels; the Defence Ministry, the Interior Ministry and the National Directorate of Security; girls' hostels at Kabul University and Medical University; and a guest house used by the United Nations on Kolola Pushta Road.

Unconfirmed sources have indicated that terrorists are planning to target the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. The specific timeframe is unknown, but some of the terrorists involved in the plot are believed to already be in Kabul and an attack could be imminent. Recent credible information indicates that terrorists may be planning to attack another major hotel in Kabul.

In January 2008, terrorists attacked the Serena Hotel in Kabul using small arms fire and explosives. Credible reporting indicates there is renewed and ongoing terrorist threat to the Serena Hotel. Australians are strongly advised to continue to avoid the Serena Hotel and its surrounds at this time.

In planning your activities, consider the kind of places known to be terrorist targets and the level of security provided. Possible terrorist targets include commercial and public areas such as hotels (including the Intercontinental and Serena hotels in Kabul), restaurants, clubs, markets, shops, Kabul airport and non-government organisation (NGO) premises. Multinational forces, multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, Western embassies and Afghan government buildings and political figures are also targets for attack. Suicide bombers have targeted security personnel. Attacks have occurred near the Kabul Police Headquarters and on buses carrying police and military officers.

**Attacks on roads:** We continue to receive a stream of credible reporting indicating that terrorists are planning attacks along roads in and around Kabul. You should avoid non-essential road travel in Kabul City and avoid travelling on Jalalabad and Airport (Great Massoud) roads due to the very high threat of terrorist attack. Australian government officials are advised not to travel on Jalalabad and Airport roads unless essential. You are strongly advised not to travel at night.

Suicide bombers in vehicles have attacked convoys near Kabul International Airport. On 13 March 2008, a suicide bomber attacked Multinational forces near the airport, killing at least eight civilians and wounding more than 20.

Attacks could take place anywhere in Afghanistan, including centres such as Kabul, Kandahar, Ghazni City and Bagram.

Serious terrorist incidents in Afghanistan, including suicide bombings and the detonation of improvised explosive devices, occur regularly in Afghanistan, including in Kabul and Kandahar. A large number of people, including civilian foreign nationals, have been killed. Many recent attacks have targeted international convoys. Australian soldiers have been killed and injured in roadside bomb attacks in Oruzgan Province. Continuing violence, including further suicide attacks, is expected. Attacks could occur anywhere, anytime.

The United Nations has suspended road missions in many parts of the country. Warlords control many areas and overland travel is dangerous. Taliban and al-Qaeda members remain in some parts of the country thereby creating a significant security risk. See also the Local Travel section below.

**Kidnapping:** There is a continuing high threat of kidnapping against Westerners, including journalists and those working for non-government organisations (NGOs). Kidnappings of foreign nationals for political and criminal reasons are increasingly common in Afghanistan, including in Kabul. Foreign aid workers and journalists have been kidnapped and killed. Westerners, including employees of NGOs and international organisations, are expected to continue to be targeted. During 2007, there were more than 160 incidents of kidnap in Afghanistan. Many involved foreign nationals. In July 2007, 23 South Korean aid workers were kidnapped from a bus in Ghazni Province. Twenty-one were released six weeks later. Two were killed.

Credible reports indicate that terrorists are planning to lure Western journalists to Afghanistan with offers of interviews in order to take them hostage.

Be aware that terrorists may have different national backgrounds, including from Western countries.

Security arrangements for Australian Embassy staff in Kabul are at a high level at all times. Embassy officials have been instructed to avoid all non-essential local movement at this time.

## Civil Unrest/Political Tension

You should avoid demonstrations, public gatherings and minor disputes that may occur as they have the potential to escalate and become violent. If you are in an area affected by demonstrations, you should find a safe location, remain indoors and heed local advice. You should closely monitor the media and other local information sources for information about new possible safety and security risks.

In the past, demonstrations have resulted in deaths and injuries and have affected areas frequented by foreigners, including the diplomatic quarter, the presidency and US and NATO bases.

International events and political developments may prompt demonstrations in Afghanistan. You should also read our travel bulletin entitled [Re-publication of cartoons and release of a film by Netherlands MP Geert Wilders](#). The release of this film is expected to provoke violent anti-Dutch and possibly anti-Western reaction.

Anti-government groups have undertaken terrorist acts against members of the Afghanistan Government. Government officials have been assassinated.

## Crime

There is a high level of serious crime in Afghanistan, including in the capital, Kabul.

Armed robbery, rape and car-jacking are common and the level of gun ownership is high.

You should stay indoors after dark.

## Local Travel

Due to a deterioration in security in the provinces surrounding Kabul, travel by road from Kabul by foreigners, including Australians, has been restricted by the Afghan government to those with armed security.

You are advised to consult a reputable security company about appropriate security arrangements, including at home and at work and for all travel. Fully implementing security advice will help to mitigate, but not eliminate, the very high threat of attack.

Travel outside Kabul should only be to properly secured workplaces. You should avoid unnecessary road travel in Kabul City. If travelling by road, you should only travel in secure transport with close protection, using reputable local drivers and guides. You should consider permanent armed protection, though even these precautions cannot guarantee personal safety.

Kabul International Airport may close at short notice. You should check with your airline before going to the airport.

Car-jacking is a problem.

Banditry in rural areas by armed groups is common.

Unexploded landmines and other ordnance are a danger throughout Afghanistan.

## Airline Safety

Passengers on international flights to and from Australia are only allowed to carry a small amount of liquids (including aerosols and gels) in their carry-on baggage. You can find out more information at the [Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government](#) website. Similar restrictions apply to flights in an increasing number of countries. Contact your airline for further information.

If you have concerns about the safety standards of a particular airline or aircraft, we recommend you research the airline or aircraft through organisations such as Australia's [Civil Aviation Safety Authority](#) and the [International Civil Aviation Organisation \(ICAO\)](#). The [Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government](#) has published fact sheets on security for air travellers. When staff at Australia's overseas missions are advised not to use particular airlines due to safety concerns, this will be included in the travel advisory.

The [European Union \(EU\)](#) has published a list of airlines that are subject to operating bans or restrictions within the EU. The [United States Federal Aviation Administration \(FAA\)](#) through its foreign assessment program focuses on a country's ability, not the individual airline, to adhere to international standards and recommended practices for aircraft operations and maintenance established by ICAO.

## Natural Disasters, Severe Weather and Climate

Afghanistan is in an active earthquake zone. Information on natural disasters can be obtained from the [Humanitarian Early Warning Service](#). If a natural disaster occurs, follow the advice of local authorities.

## Money and Valuables

Before you go, organise a variety of ways to access your money overseas, such as credit cards, travellers' cheques, cash, debit cards or cash cards. Check with your bank whether your ATM card will

work overseas. There is a small number of ATMs in Kabul. Credit cards and travellers' cheques are not widely accepted

Make two photocopies of valuables such as your passport, tickets, visas and travellers' cheques. Keep one copy with you in a separate place to the original and leave another copy with someone at home.

While travelling, don't carry too much cash and remember that expensive watches, jewellery and cameras may be tempting targets for thieves.

As a sensible precaution against luggage tampering and theft, lock your luggage. Information on luggage safety is available from Australia's [Civil Aviation Safety Authority](#).

Your passport is a valuable document that is attractive to criminals who may try to use your identity to commit crimes. It should always be kept in a safe place. You are required by Australian law to report a lost or stolen passport. If your passport is lost or stolen overseas, report it online or contact the nearest [Australian Embassy, High Commission or Consulate](#) as soon as possible.

You are required to pay an additional fee to have a lost or stolen passport replaced. In some cases, the Government may also restrict the length of validity or type of replacement passports.

## For Parents

If you are planning on placing your children in schools or childcare facilities overseas we encourage you to research the standards of security, care and staff training within those establishments. You should exercise the same precautions you would take before placing children into schools or childcare facilities in Australia.

Ideas on how to select childcare providers are available from the smartraveller [Children's Issues page](#), [Child Wise](#) and the [National Childcare Accreditation Council](#).

## Local Laws

When you are in Afghanistan, be aware that local laws and penalties, including ones that appear harsh by Australian standards, do apply to you. If you are arrested or jailed, the Australian Government will do what it can to help you but we can't get you out of trouble or out of jail.

Information on what Australian consular officers can and cannot do to help Australians in trouble overseas is available from the [Consular Services Charter](#).

Death sentences are imposed for murder and other serious offences.

Homosexuality is illegal.

Preaching (non-Islamic), infidelity and abandoning religion (Islam) are considered serious crimes. Penalties are severe.

You can be detained and your equipment could be seized for photographing any military installation (regardless of which nation operates it), government buildings and palaces. Signs prohibiting photography should be strictly obeyed. You should ask permission before photographing local people.

Regulations governing the import and use of prohibited items, including alcohol and pork products, are strictly enforced.

Some Australian criminal laws, such as those relating to money laundering, bribery of foreign public officials, terrorism and child sex tourism, apply to Australians overseas. Australians who commit these

offences while overseas may be prosecuted in Australia.

Australian authorities are committed to combating sexual exploitation of children by Australians overseas. Australians may be prosecuted at home under Australian child sex tourism laws. These laws provide severe penalties of up to 17 years imprisonment for Australians who engage in sexual activity with children under 16 while outside of Australia.

## Local Customs

There are strong Islamic codes of dress and behaviour in Afghanistan and you should take care not to offend. If in doubt, seek local advice.

Foreign men and women should dress modestly in public and ensure their legs are covered. Women should also cover their arms, while men may wear short-sleeved shirts. Local women cover their hair in public. Foreign women should use their judgement when deciding whether to follow suit.

During Ramadan, eating, drinking and smoking between sunrise and sunset is forbidden for Muslims. You should not eat, drink or smoke in public during these times. You should also read our [Ramadan travel bulletin](#).

Public displays of affection cause offence.

## Entry and Exit Requirements

Visa and other entry and exit conditions (such as currency, customs and quarantine regulations) change regularly. Contact the nearest [Embassy or Consulate of Afghanistan](#) for the most up-to-date information.

If you are planning to travel to and from Afghanistan via Pakistan ensure you have a multiple entry for Pakistan, otherwise you will need to get another entry visa from the Pakistani embassy in Kabul, which could delay your travel plans.

It is difficult to renew passports from Afghanistan. If you are in Afghanistan and require a new passport, be sure to contact the Australian Embassy in Kabul well in advance of your passport expiring or running out of pages.

## Health Issues

We strongly recommend that you take out comprehensive [travel insurance](#) that will cover any overseas medical costs, before you depart. Confirm that your insurance covers you for the whole time you'll be away and check what circumstances and activities are not included in your policy. Remember, regardless of how healthy and fit you are, if you can't afford travel insurance, you can't afford to travel.

Your doctor or travel clinic is the best source of information about preventive measures, immunisations (including booster doses of childhood vaccinations) and disease outbreaks overseas. The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) provides information for travellers and our [Travelling Well brochure](#) also provides useful tips for travelling with medicines and staying healthy while overseas.

Medical facilities are limited throughout Afghanistan, including Kabul. The standard of training for medical staff is low, while sanitation and hygiene are poor. There is a shortage of basic medical supplies and medicines. Several private medical clinics in Kabul may be used for routine health issues. Clinics will request up-front payment for all medical treatment. In the event of a serious accident or illness, a medical evacuation would be necessary. Medical evacuation costs would be considerable.

Malaria is prevalent in Afghanistan, particularly between April and September, except in areas above

Malaria is prevalent in Afghanistan, particularly between April and September, except in areas above 2000 metres. Chloroquine resistant strains are prevalent in some areas. Other insect-borne diseases (such as leishmaniasis) are common. We recommend you take prophylaxis against malaria and take measures to avoid insect bites, including using an insect repellent.

Water-borne, food-borne, parasitic and other infectious diseases (including cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, measles, tuberculosis, leptospirosis, polio, pertussis and rabies) are prevalent, with more serious outbreaks occurring from time to time. We encourage you to discuss the need for vaccinations with your doctor before travelling. We advise you to boil all drinking water or drink bottled water, and avoid ice cubes and raw and undercooked food. Seek medical advice if you have a fever or are suffering from diarrhoea.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has confirmed cases of avian influenza in birds in a number of countries throughout the world, including Afghanistan. For a list of these countries, visit the [OIE website](#). For information on our advice to Australians on how to reduce the risk of infection and on Australian Government precautions see our [travel bulletin](#) on avian influenza.

## Where to Get Help

The Australian Embassy in Kabul has been closed to the public since 16 October 2007 due to security concerns. The provision of consular services to Australians in Afghanistan may be severely restricted due to the safety and security environment.

If you are in Afghanistan and require essential and urgent consular assistance, you should call the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre on +61 2 6261 3305. The Consular Emergency Centre can be contacted on 1300 555 135 within Australia.

The Australian High Commission in Pakistan should be contacted regarding all Australian visa matters. The address is:

Australian High Commission  
Constitution Avenue and Ispahani Road  
Diplomatic Enclave No. 1  
Sector G-5/4  
Islamabad PAKISTAN  
Telephone: (92 51) 282 4345  
Facsimile: (92 51) 282 0112  
E-mail: [consular.islm@dfat.gov.au](mailto:consular.islm@dfat.gov.au)  
Website: <http://www.pakistan.highcommission.gov.au/>

If you are travelling to Afghanistan, whatever the reason and however long you'll be there, we strongly recommend you to register with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. You can register [online](#) or in person at any [Australian Embassy, High Commission or Consulate](#). The information you provide will help us to contact you in an emergency - whether it is a natural disaster, civil disturbance or a family issue.

In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra may be contacted on (02) 6261 3305.

This Advice was issued on Monday, 08 September 2008, 12:56:45, EST.