

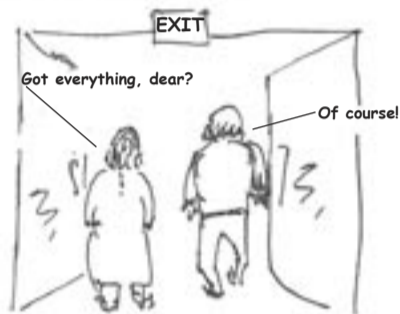
Know where you stand with travel insurance

For many people, travel insurance is an afterthought, possibly arranged at the last minute, maybe even bought from a travel agent.

It does pay to check the fine print to see that the policy covers your needs and to shop around for the best deal.

The 2006 annual report by the Insurance Ombudsman revealed that there had been a 15.5% increase in travel claims resulting in a 44% increase in travel-related disputes, up from 1,332 to 1,924. This had been fuelled by a significant increase in the number of travel claims rejected by insurers — up by a whopping 228%, from 5,003 last year to 16,416 this year.

The Ombudsman stressed that there was a need for more explanation when people bought travel insurance so that consumers really understood the cover provided by the travel policies they were buying.



Claims relating to unattended luggage and pre-existing medical conditions form the basis of most of the complaints made to the Ombudsman in the period covered by the 2006 report.


Disputes about policy conditions or what was excluded from coverage were other reasons why people had their claims declined.

Here are some tips about making sure you're familiar with the terms and conditions of your insurance policy in case the unexpected happens. You don't want to be arguing with your insurer as well as coping with stress of disrupted plans, away from home.

Does the policy cover your needs?

A travel insurance policy will usually cover events such as personal injury

Delia Rickard asks, "Will you be travelling during the holiday season?" and gives some timely tips about insurance



and loss or theft of your possessions, but it will also contain a number of exclusions. That's why it's important to read the fine detail about your proposed policy and, if in doubt, ask your insurer about how conditions or exclusions work in practice.

Comparing different travel insurance policies might save you money as well as some nasty surprises. Try to find a policy that suits you and the type of holiday you're planning.

Don't just chase the cheapest policy without checking exactly what it covers or you could end up without enough cover.

For example, some policies cover a broader range of adventure-type activities. Many include 24-hour medical assistance, a help line and private hospital cover but be careful of any "special circumstances" that might apply.

What's commonly excluded?

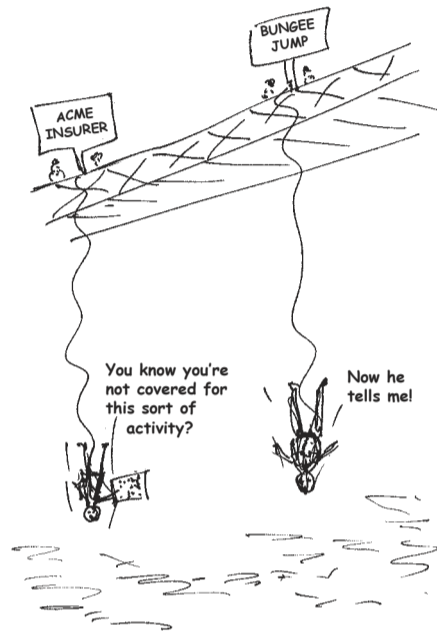
No travel insurance policy will cover you for everything that might happen on your holiday. Many policies exclude claims for loss or damage suffered in situations that may affect you. Some risks you may have to shoulder for yourself. For others, you may have to pay a higher premium.

Financial problems: You probably won't be covered if you cancel your plans because of a change in your financial circumstances or business obligations or because your airline stops trading and you can no longer travel.

Terrorism, dangerous destinations: Standard policies may not cover you if you cancel plans because of fear of terrorism or if you travel to certain



countries against the advice of the Australian Government. Check the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's travel advisory web site — www.smartraveller.gov.au — for the latest travel warnings.



Adventure sports or other hazardous activities like bungee jumping, white-water rafting, ballooning, snow skiing and scuba diving will frequently be excluded from policies.

Medical conditions and ageing: Your private health insurance in Australia may not provide coverage overseas. Make sure you keep yourself covered for medical emergencies by telling your insurer about any pre-existing medical conditions.

It's also important to tell your insurer about existing medical conditions that affecting close family members. Many policies do not cover you if you have to cut short your trip because the condition of a relative at home with an existing medical condition worsens. Also, if you travel against medical advice, you may lose your cover.

Older people can find it difficult to get cover. Many policies will exclude anyone over 80 years old. If you're over 70, you will usually need a medical assessment and you'll probably have to pay a higher premium.

Personal property and cash: You probably won't be able to make a claim if you leave your luggage unattended in a public place and it is lost or stolen.

Keep valuable items such as cameras, sound equipment, or mobile phones with you. If they're stolen while left unattended in a hire car, you probably won't be covered. Many insurers don't cover loss or theft of cash at all.

Take a copy of the policy with you on holiday so that you know what to do if something goes wrong;

Make sure you know when you are required to notify local authorities about loss or theft in order for a claim to be paid, within perhaps 24 hours;

Keep the receipts of any expenses (such as hotel accommodation, replacement of personal effects) you paid because of an insured event that you might claim on your return;

Carry the details of the emergency assistance offered by your insurer;

Be careful if you're considering some risky/adventurous activity.

Making a claim

If an accident does happen, your policy might prevent you from admitting that you are at fault. Check any deadlines for making a claim.

Many policies may require you to pay an excess. Your policy might have a separate excess for different types of claims set out in the policy. If you have two unrelated claims you might have to pay two lots of excess.

If you disagree with a decision about your travel-insurance claim, first raise this directly with the insurer by using its dispute-resolution system. If you can't resolve the matter then you can lodge a complaint with the Insurance Ombudsman Service scheme.

Ask FIDO at www.fido.gov.au for more information about insurance. Ask FIDO whenever you're considering an important financial decision.

Delia Rickard is Acting Executive Director Consumer Protection for the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) www.fido.gov.au

DVA's Christmas-New Year holiday arrangements

The Department of Veterans' Affairs and Veterans' Affairs Network offices will be closed over the Christmas and New Year period from Tuesday December 25 to January 1 2008 inclusive. The department will reopen for normal business on Wednesday January 2.

As in previous years, DVA services over the Christmas-New Year period will be provided through the Department's after-hours arrangements, similar to those in place for the Easter break, public holidays and weekends.

Under these arrangements, many key DVA services will continue to be available, including:

Transport — if transport is not booked before the Christmas period it will need to be paid for up-front and reimbursement can be sought from DVA at a later date;

Hospital admissions — doctors can admit DVA patients into hospital and request admissions approval, where required, when DVA reopens;

Crisis counselling — the Veterans' and Veterans' Families' Counselling Serv-

ice offers 24-hour crisis counselling through Veterans' Line. This service is toll-free on **1800 011 046** to veterans of all conflicts and their families, including members of peacekeeping missions; and

Defence Service Homes Insurance — help with policy and claim inquiries is available 24 hours a day on **1300 552 662** and payments can be made on **1300 304 989** for the price of a local call.

Individuals who require Rehabilitation Appliances Program (RAP) sup-

plies are advised to ensure that they have supplies to last them through the Christmas-New Year period.

RAP suppliers will be closed at weekends as well as December 25 and 26 and January 1 in the Christmas-New Year period.

In case of emergency, people should contact local medical officers or health-care professionals.

Closure of DVA offices will not affect pension payments, which will still be received on December 20, 2007 and January 3, 2008.