



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



CONSULAR STATE OF PLAY

2017–18

smartraveller.gov.au

BE INFORMED ► BE PREPARED

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

TRAVEL ADVICE

Smartraveller.gov.au

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CONSULAR EMERGENCY CENTRE (24/7)

+61 2 6261 3305
from overseas

1300 555 135
from within Australia

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for SMS

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES

dfat.gov.au/missions

PASSPORT INFORMATION

passports.gov.au

ENQUIRES ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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DFAT.GOV.AU

EACH YEAR OUR *CONSULAR STATE OF PLAY* REPORT PROVIDES STATISTICS ON THE CONSULAR ASSISTANCE CASES WE MANAGED DURING THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF PLAY?

This report covers cases that were open in 2017–18. While most cases happened during the year, some may have remained open from a previous year.

As well as the location and type of consular assistance provided, this report also includes information on travel destinations, age groups, travel insurance and general travel advice.

WHAT IS CONSULAR ASSISTANCE?

Many Australians travel or live overseas trouble-free. If a problem does come up, most don't need consular assistance because they have travel insurance, travel agents, employers, family or friends to help.

But around one in 1,000 Australians who are overseas at any one time do need help from the Australian Government. This might be because of a major crisis or emergency, or an accident, illness or crime.

When this happens, Australians can seek help from our global diplomatic network. We give priority to cases involving vulnerable Australians, such as children and victims of assault, including sexual assault, or people who are less able to help themselves because of a mental health condition.

WHAT IS A CONSULAR CASE?

When consular officials assist Australians overseas, they open a case in DFAT's Consular Information System.

Every case is different. Some are resolved quickly, for example when consular staff provide information and advice to allow the traveller to sort out an immediate problem themselves. Some cases take longer. Assistance related to a natural disaster or terrorist attack may take weeks, months or even years to resolve.

Our case file stays open until the matter is resolved.



Our *Consular Service Charter* describes what we can do to help Australians overseas.

It also explains situations where assistance may be limited and what we ask of travellers. This includes taking personal responsibility for choices and safety, following our travel advice at smartraveller.gov.au, and taking out appropriate travel insurance.

smartraveller.gov.au/consular-services-charter

WHAT ASSISTANCE DO WE PROVIDE?



We provide assistance related to:

- passports
- welfare checks
- whereabouts enquiries for crisis response and missing persons
- deaths
- hospitalisations
- arrests, detentions and imprisonment
- victims of crime
- limited emergency financial assistance in exceptional circumstances.

However, assistance may be limited for:

- illegal, deliberate, reckless or negligent actions, or actions that put people at risk
- repeated patterns of behaviour
- dual nationals in the country of other nationality.

HOW MANY LOCATIONS OFFER ASSISTANCE?

As part of our role to promote and protect Australia's interests internationally, we manage a network of overseas posts.

At 30 June 2018, Australians could receive consular assistance from **187 locations**.

Australians in need of consular assistance, or their families and friends, can call the nearest Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. If they can't reach their nearest location, for example if it's after hours, they can call the Consular Emergency Centre for urgent assistance.

We give priority to vulnerable Australians and people who are less able to help themselves

112 in **83**
countries
EMBASSIES
HIGH COMMISSIONS
CONSULATES
CONSULATES-GENERAL
REPRESENTATIVE OFFICES

55 in **49**
countries
HONORARY
CONSULS

13 in **15**
countries
CANADIAN
MISSIONS
(provide some consular services to Australian citizens)

TRAVEL ADVICE

WE ENCOURAGE AUSTRALIANS TRAVELLING OR LIVING OVERSEAS TO BE INFORMED AND PREPARED.

The **Smartraveller website** is the place to start. It contains well informed, local advice and information for **176 destinations**. This advice represents an objective assessment of the risks Australians may face overseas. This includes the current level of risk and how to minimise exposure to threats. It helps Australians decide where and when to travel.



OUR MOST VISITED COUNTRY PAGES IN 2017-18:



INDONESIA
528,439 views



VIETNAM
456,175 views



USA
357,095 views



THAILAND
257,499 views



JAPAN
224,655 views

SMARTTRAVELLER WEBSITE USE

In 2017-18 the Smartraveller website was viewed more than **20 million times**, averaging nearly 16,000 unique visitors a day.

We published **742 updates** to travel advisories for different destinations, as well as **18 special event bulletins**, such as for the FIFA World Cup and Anzac Day.

Social media engagement continued to increase, with followers for Smartraveller's Facebook site **up 19%** and Twitter account **up 21.5%**.

A surge of interest in Vietnam (55% increase in views) and Indonesia (36% increase in views) saw those two country pages move up to first and second in the top five during the year. Thailand page views fell 34%, moving from the most viewed to the fourth most viewed page. Japan made the top five this year replacing France and moving up from number 10 last year.



19%
Facebook
follower increase



21.5%
Twitter
follower increase

We recommend
Australians subscribe to
travel advice updates or
follow our social media
smartraveller.gov.au

TRAVEL INSURANCE

We advise Australians to make informed decisions about where and when to travel, and to ensure they have the right travel insurance for where they're going and what they're planning to do.

Australians need to cover their own emergency-related costs if they travel without insurance, or with insurance that does not cover all their planned destinations, activities and pre-existing medical conditions. Medical treatment overseas or evacuation to Australia or another country can be very expensive.

If you can't afford insurance,
you can't afford to travel

**smartraveller.gov.au/
insurance**

ATTITUDES TO INSURANCE

A recent survey of **traveller behaviour in South East Asia** revealed some insights about attitudes to travel insurance.



11% had no travel insurance

Uninsured travellers were significantly more likely to be **men and under 30 years**

- 13% of men travelled without insurance
- 18% of those aged 18–29 travelled without insurance

13% of those without insurance expected the Australian Government would contribute to medical expenses (it does not)

82% of under-30s undertook a **risky behaviour** like water sports, riding motorcycles and excessive consumption of alcohol

19% of people with **pre-existing medical conditions** did not check if their insurance covered it

This research also shows that **44%** who did have travel insurance took part in one or more risky activities not covered by their insurance.

Misunderstanding what is covered can lead to insurance claims being declined. For example, an insurance claim may be declined for the following reasons:

- excessive use of alcohol
- use of illegal drugs or misuse of prescription drugs
- not declaring a pre-existing medical or mental health condition/s
- behaviour considered risky by the insurer without the appropriate cover, such as adventure sports or use of a motorcycle, scooter or moped
- travelling to countries that have a current DFAT 'do not travel' warning
- not possessing a valid licence to drive a vehicle or ride a motorbike
- not wearing the appropriate clothing or equipment such as helmets.

Source: understandinsurance.com.au and DFAT, Traveller Behaviour in South East Asia Report, July 2018.

INTERNATIONAL DEPARTURES

THERE WERE MORE THAN 10.7 MILLION OVERSEAS TRIPS FROM AUSTRALIA IN 2017–18. THIS NUMBER HAS STEADILY INCREASED AND IS UP 13% FROM 9.5 MILLION FIVE YEARS AGO.

CONTEXT FOR THE STATISTICS

Australians are great travellers, but official statistics do not show the full extent of travel by Australians while they are overseas. For example, statistics previously collected on incoming passenger cards ask people where they spent the most time while overseas, rather than every country visited when Australians travel to multiple countries. Also, we do not know everything about countries visited by Australian who are living overseas.

TOP DESTINATIONS

The top ten destinations for 2017–18 were in the same order and with similar numbers as last year. However, there was an increase in trips to the United Kingdom and China, and Japan has taken over from Singapore in 7th place while India has taken over from Fiji in 9th place.

CRUISE TRIPS

The number of Australians taking cruise trips outside Australia has steadily increased from 684,821 in 2013 to 889,000 in 2017.



1.34 MILLION

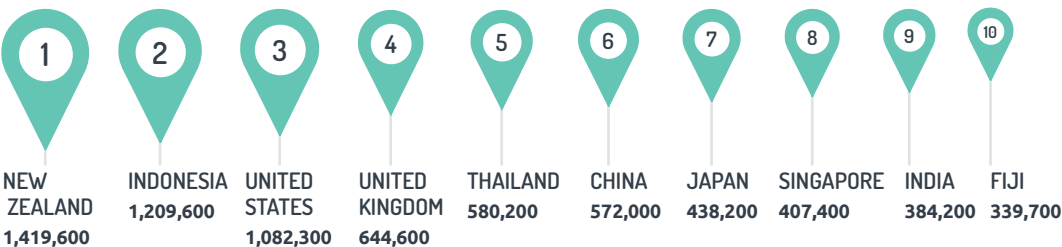
The overall number of Australians taking cruises worldwide in 2017.

Source: Cruise Lines International Association.
Note these figures are from the 2017 calendar year.

AUSTRALIANS LIVING OVERSEAS

A total of 1 million Australian citizens are estimated to be living overseas at any given time.

TOP TEN DESTINATIONS FOR OVERSEAS TRIPS

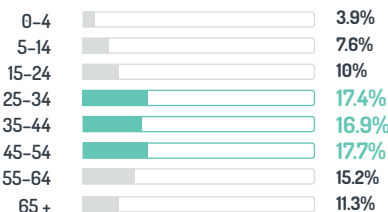


Source: Department of Home Affairs

AGE OF TRAVELLERS

There was an increase in all age groups apart from those aged 15–24. The largest group of travellers remains those aged between 25 and 54 years.

TRIPS BY AGE (% OF TOTAL)



Source: Department of Home Affairs. Note these figures are rounded and are from the 2017 calendar year.

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR ASSISTANCE CASES



THAILAND
967 up 8%



UNITED STATES
750 down 12%



INDONESIA
610 down 15%



PHILIPPINES
590 up 13%



CHINA (MAINLAND)
391 down 1%

CONSULAR ASSISTANCE CASES

During the year there were **11,880** open consular assistance cases. On **any one day** there were around **1,500 active cases**.

This is down from 12,454 cases in 2016–17 and 15,740 cases in 2015–16. However, the drop is less significant when crisis cases are excluded, with an average of **around 10,400 cases a year**.

When considered in context of the increasing number of departures for overseas trips, this indicates many travellers are doing the right thing: being informed and prepared.

In 2017–18 the top five countries for consular assistance cases were the same countries, in the same order, as 2016–17.

Australians in trouble overseas can contact the nearest Australian Embassy, High Commission or Consulate



TYPES OF ASSISTANCE CASES



3,062
WELFARE



2,510
WHEREABOUTS
2,001 crisis
509 routine



1,671
DEATH



1,585
HOSPITALISATION



1,540
ARREST



533
THEFT



386
IMPRISONMENT



269
ASSAULT



280
OTHER
ASSISTANCE



EMERGENCY CALLS

The Consular Emergency Centre supports our network of Embassies and Consulates overseas by ensuring 24/7 availability of urgent assistance to Australians on consular or passport matters.

In 2017–18 the Consular Emergency Centre responded to **62,345 calls**, down by 6% from the previous year. Most calls do not require us to open an official consular case file.

HOSPITALISATION CASES

We provide details of local doctors and hospitals in a medical emergency.

Consular assistance may also include liaison with local hospitals and local authorities, and helping to communicate with family members or nominated contacts.

In 2017–18 we helped in **1,585** cases of Australians hospitalised overseas.

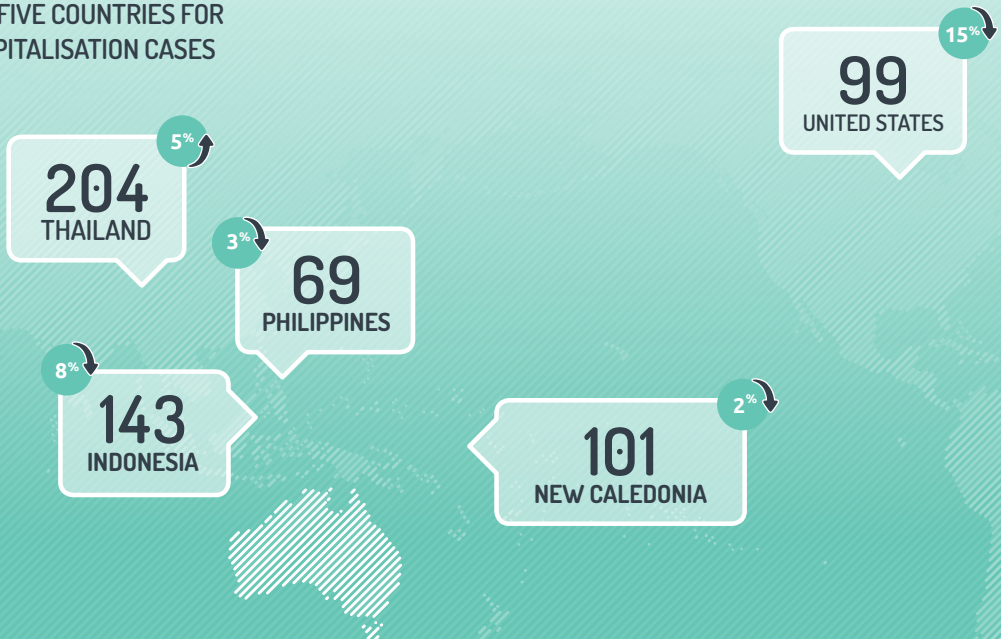
This was a 7% decrease on 2016–17, but still much higher (19%) than five years ago.

Most cases occurred in Thailand, followed by Indonesia. This is due, in part, to the older age of Australians living and travelling in Thailand compared with other countries.

New Caledonia remained in the top five this year, reflecting the continued popularity of cruises in the Pacific, with an older demographic more vulnerable to illness or accident.

The Smarttraveller website has guidance for Australians on taking care of their health while travelling

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR HOSPITALISATION CASES



DEATH CASES

WE PROVIDE ADVICE AND SUPPORT TO FAMILIES IN CASES WHERE AN AUSTRALIAN HAS DIED OVERSEAS. THIS MAY INCLUDE LIAISON WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO ASSIST WITH FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS AND REPATRIATION OF REMAINS.

In 2017–18 we supported families in **1,671** cases of deaths of Australians overseas.

While this is similar to 2016–17, there has been an overall increase of 36% over the past five years.

Most deaths are a result of an illness or natural causes, possibly due to an ageing population travelling more and retiring overseas.

This year there was an increase in the number of death cases in the Philippines and Thailand. This corresponds with an increasing number of older Australians travelling to or retiring in these countries.

Not all the cases represent deaths that happened in 2017–18. Some death cases may remain open for months or even years, particularly if there are lengthy legal processes or local investigations.

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR DEATH CASES



TOP THREE CAUSES OF DEATH



CASE STUDY

Phil was half way through his retirement holiday in Europe when a persistent cough and fever saw him hospitalised with pneumonia. Unfortunately, his condition deteriorated and he died in hospital. As a fit 68-year-old, Phil hadn't anticipated becoming seriously ill on his long-planned trip, but he had wisely taken out comprehensive travel insurance. Phil's family in Australia received consular assistance

including a list of in-country funeral directors, and help to navigate local administrative processes. Phil's insurance company helped his next of kin appoint their preferred funeral director. The insurance company also organised and covered the cost of repatriating Phil's remains, so his ashes could be flown home for his family to hold a memorial service.

WHEREABOUTS CASES

UNEXPECTEDLY LOSING CONTACT WITH A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND TRAVELLING OR LIVING OVERSEAS CAN BE DISTRESSING. WE PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN CRISIS RESPONSE CASES AND WHEREABOUTS CASES.

If family and friends have tried to contact someone by all possible means and cannot find them, the Australian Government does what it can to provide advice and support.

In 2017–18 we provided assistance in **509** whereabouts cases.

This is a 27% decrease on 2016–17.

As expected, there is a correlation between the location of these cases and popular destinations for overseas trips, with the Philippines the only country not in the top 10 destinations last year.



Australians overseas can alleviate concerns by keeping in touch with friends, family and colleagues, especially if they are near a major incident

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR WHEREABOUTS CASES



THAILAND
63 down 15%



UNITED STATES
33 down 46%



PHILLIPINES
28 up 4%



CHINA (MAINLAND)
24 down 23%



INDONESIA
22 down 49%

CRISIS RESPONSE CASES



Some international crises and emergencies require an exceptional response to help Australians in need. This includes incidents such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks or pandemics.

In such cases, we may deploy expert teams to assist affected Australians, liaise with families, work with local authorities, support Australians trying to leave the area, and provide crisis updates and travel advice.

In 2017–18 we provided assistance in **2,001** cases to trace the whereabouts of Australians potentially caught up in international emergencies.

This is an 8% increase from 2016–17. However, it is down significantly on the three years before that, representing an overall 58% decrease since 2013–14.

Fortunately there were fewer large-scale incidents overseas affecting Australians in 2017–18. Events during the year that generated whereabouts checks were the Las Vegas shooting (October 2017), the earthquake in Mexico (September 2017) and the Barcelona terrorist attack (August 2017).

WELFARE CASES

We provide assistance related to the welfare of Australians in a range of situations, including cases involving mental health, when someone is sick but not hospitalised, when someone has an appearance in Court, and kidnapping and parental child abduction cases.

In 2017–18 we provided assistance in **3,062** welfare cases.

While this is about the same as 2016–17, it represents an overall decrease of 29% over the past five years.

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR WELFARE CASES



THAILAND
274 up 11%



PHILLIPINES
250 up 17%



INDONESIA
194 down 17%



UNITED STATES
175 up 8%



VIETNAM
117 up 39%



ARREST AND DETENTION CASES

We do what we can to ensure Australians arrested or detained overseas are treated fairly under the laws of the country where they were arrested. This may include providing details of local lawyers, checking on the person's wellbeing, liaising with local authorities and helping to communicate with family members or nominated contacts. However, **we cannot provide legal advice**, get Australians better treatment than local prisoners, get them out of prison or detention, or stop them being deported.

In 2017–18 we provided assistance in **1,540** arrests and detention cases. This is a 6% decrease on 2016–17 but represents an overall increase of 28% over the past five years.

Immigration detention, where Australians are denied entry to a country or breached visa conditions, accounted for **385** of these cases, a 4% drop on last year. There was a significant increase (72%) in these cases in Thailand, where the immigration policy was tightened during the year, particularly visa overstays.

While the United States again accounted for the most arrests and detentions, the order of the other countries in the top five changed this year, and Japan replaced the Philippines at number five.

This is the first year Japan has been in the top five countries for arrest and detention cases.

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR ARREST AND DETENTION CASES



UNITED STATES

241 down 15%
127 criminal related
114 immigration related



THAILAND

122 up 22%
91 criminal-related
31 immigration-related



CHINA (MAINLAND)

113 up 12%
102 criminal-related
11 immigration-related



UAE

95 down 9%
73 criminal-related
22 immigration-related



JAPAN

71 up 20%
60 criminal-related
11 immigration-related

Australians need to know and obey local laws.
Relevant advice is on **smartraveller.gov.au**

DRUG-RELATED ARREST CASES

Penalties for drug-related offences in many countries are severe and can include life imprisonment or the death penalty. These laws are strictly enforced and even small quantities of 'soft drugs' can attract heavy fines or jail sentences in prisons that might be much harsher than in Australia.

Travellers should always be aware of what is in their bags, especially when crossing international borders. They should not carry anything for someone else while travelling.

Australians who need to take medication on a trip should check if it is legal in countries they are visiting and make sure they have paperwork, such as a doctor's letter or prescription.

There was a significant increase in drug-related arrests in Japan in 2017-18. This reflects Japan's increasing popularity as an affordable travel destination and also its strict law enforcement.

Don't ever carry or consume illegal drugs overseas

smartraveller.gov.au/drugs

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR DRUG RELATED ARRESTS



CHINA (MAINLAND)
19 up 58%



JAPAN
19 up 171%



THAILAND
16 up 23%



UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES
13 no % change



VIETNAM
13 up 18%

IMPRISONMENT CASES

We visit or contact Australians who have been arrested or detained overseas to check on their welfare. We will raise any welfare concerns with prison authorities.

In 2017-18 we managed **386** active imprisonment cases. This is a slight increase of 4% on 2016-17, reflecting the overall upward trend, with a 15% increase over the past five years.

Fraud and drugs cases accounted for most of these imprisonments.

In 2017-18, we managed



ACTIVE
IMPRISONMENT
CASES
an increase of 4%

CHINA
(MAINLAND)



50 no % change
Most were fraud
or drug related

UNITED
STATES



45 down 13 %
Almost half were
sex offences

VIETNAM



40 up 18 %
Almost all were
drug related

NEW
ZEALAND



31 up 24%
Most were assault, sexual
assault or drug related

INDONESIA



30 up 30 %
Almost all were
drug related

VICTIMS OF CRIME CASES

WE PROVIDE APPROPRIATE HELP, INCLUDING DETAILS OF LOCAL LAWYERS AND INTERPRETERS, FOR AUSTRALIANS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF CRIME OR SERIOUS ASSAULT OVERSEAS.

In 2017–18 we assisted in **802** victims of crime cases. This included 533 theft cases and 269 assault cases.

Theft cases fell by 31% and assault cases fell by 15% compared with 2016–17. But while the five-year trend is for a significant decrease in theft cases (57%), there has been a 25% increase in assault cases over that time.

Sexual assault cases accounted for 48% of the total assault cases (128 cases, down from 142 in 2016–17). Despite this 10% decrease last year, sexual assault cases have increased in the longer-term, up by 75% over the past five years.

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR THEFT CASES



SPAIN
200 down 13%



ITALY
94 down 57%



MEXICO
55 down 21%



THAILAND
13 down 35%



JAPAN
11 up 38%

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES FOR ASSAULT CASES



INDONESIA
23 down 26%



THAILAND
22 up 10%



USA
14 down 22%



ITALY
14 up 17%



FIJI
12 up 50%

We can't investigate crimes committed overseas—local authorities do this—but we do provide guidance for Australians assaulted or robbed overseas
smartraveller.gov.au





PASSPORT CASES

Each year, the number of Australians holding passports increases.

In 2017–18 we issued **2,082,127** passports, similar to 2016–17. This brought the total number of Australians holding a valid passport to 14,234,420 as at 30 June 2018, or 57% of the population.

Passports are **valuable identity documents**. It's important to protect them from damage, especially the photo page. It's also important to make sure they are valid for long enough, which is often six months after leaving a

country. Even travellers on cruises should take passports in case of unplanned stops for emergencies.

Despite the best intentions, with more and more Australians travelling each year, it is inevitable some passports will go astray.

In 2017–18 a total of 43,790 passports were reported lost or stolen.

Most of these were in Australia, but **4,743** passports were reported lost or stolen overseas. This is a similar number to last year.



Our pioneering use of face biometrics is helping keep Australian passports and identities secure. When someone applies for a passport, we check the photo against our database of more than 27 million facial images. From January 2019 passport photos cannot include glasses, to improve the accuracy of facial matching.

passports.gov.au



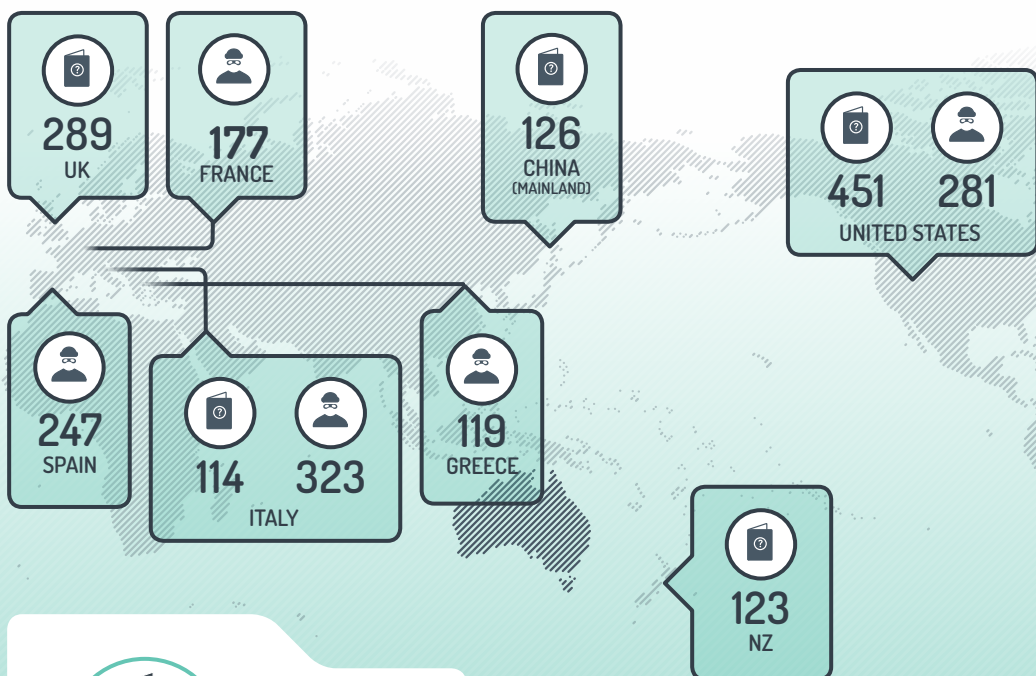
The most common damage to passports is water damage, from spilt drinks or going through the wash, and torn papers

FULL VALIDITY PASSPORTS

Embassies and consulates can also process full validity passports if travel is not urgent and the applicant has the required documentation.

In 2017–18, our posts overseas received

109,743 applications for full validity passports



EMERGENCY PASSPORTS

We can issue emergency replacement passports and travel documents for a fee. We can also cancel lost or stolen passports so they cannot be misused.

We may be able to issue an emergency passport to meet immediate travel needs. These are valid for a limited time (12 months maximum).

In 2017-18 we issued **8,431** emergency passports at overseas posts. This is a slight increase of 4% on 2016-17.

PASSPORTS LOST OR STOLEN OVERSEAS



TOP FIVE EMBASSIES OR CONSULATES FOR EMERGENCY PASSPORT CASES



PARIS



LOS ANGELES



NEW YORK



ROME



MADRID












FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE CASES

Sometimes emergency situations happen overseas, even for well-prepared travellers. This might include not being able to access money because their wallet or credit cards were stolen, lost or damaged. In most cases travel insurance, family or friends can help. In exceptional cases, we can provide small emergency loans to tide people over until they can sort out the problem themselves, or perhaps to help them get home.

There are strict conditions around these loans. Recipients sign a legal agreement to repay the loan by a certain date or in line with a payment program agreed by DFAT. In 2016–17 we issued travellers' emergency loans to **180** Australians, down from 211 in 2016–17. This reflects the longer-term downward trend, with financial assistance cases decreasing by 25% over the past five years.



SUMMARY OF CONSULAR SERVICES 2013–14 TO 2017–18

	 ARREST		 PRISONER	 DEATH	 HOSPITALISATION	 WHEREABOUTS INQUIRIES		 REPATRIATION	 WELFARE	 THEFT	 ASSAULT	 OTHER ASSISTANCE	 TOTAL CASES OF ASSISTANCE	TOTAL CASES OF ASSISTANCE EXCLUDING CRISIS WHEREABOUTS
2017–18	1,540	Criminal 1,155	386	1,671	1,585	2,510		44	3,062	533	269	280	11,880	9,879
						Crisis	Routine							
		Immigration				2,001	509							
2016–17	1,641	Criminal 1,237	370	1,653	1,701	2,546		52	3,081	773	317	320	12,454	10,603
		Immigration				Crisis	Routine							
		404				1,851	695							
2015–16	1,551	Criminal 1,198	391	1,516	1,667	5,582		76	3,089	1,238	315	315	15,740	10,737
		Immigration				Crisis	Routine							
		353				5,003	579							
2014–15	1,256		371	1,282	1,453	5,697		61	3,053	1,066	235	1,350	15,824	–
2013–14	1,185		339	1,215	1,330	4,794		74	2,370	1,238	209	1,804	14,558	–

Note: The Consular Information System introduced in June 2015 improved data and categorisation of case types, which has resulted in apparent increases in some case types and the lower number of cases categorised as 'other'.

PRIVACY POLICY

Personal information provided to DFAT is protected by law, including the *Privacy Act 1988*. DFAT's privacy policy is at dfat.gov.au/privacy.html. We may use personal information to provide consular assistance. In accordance with Australian Privacy Principle 5, information about how we collect, use, disclose and store personal information related to consular cases is contained in our Consular Privacy Collection Statement. This is at dfat.gov.au/dept/consular/privacy.html.

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Use of the Coat of Arms

The terms under which the Coat of Arms can be used are detailed on the 'It's an Honour' website itsanhonour.gov.au/coat-arms/index.cfm.

Website

dfat.gov.au/about-us/our-services/consular-services

Sources

The publication is based on data from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Consular Information System and the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Home Affairs.



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