

Safety & Security Manual

1 – INTRODUCTION

The safety and security of LiteHaus International's people is of paramount importance. LiteHaus International acknowledges that it works across very challenging environments around the world that present heightened safety and security risks to people who work in and travel to these locations.

LiteHaus International recognises and acknowledges its responsibility and duty of care in ensuring the safety and security of its people. There is also an onus on our people to be proactive in making themselves aware of safety and security risks and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of themselves and others. We are also committed to maintaining a safe, secure, and accessible workplace at our headquarters in Townsville.

The safety and security of our people is managed through a number of policies, procedures and guidelines, all consolidated in this Safety & Security Manual.

The Safety & Security Manual covers:

- Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) Plan – Townsville
- Domestic Travel
 - Procedures for risk management, approval and booking
 - Road safety/driving guidelines
- International Travel
 - Procedures for risk management, approval and booking
 - Country briefs
 - Emergency situation responses

2 – WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY

LiteHaus International staff mostly work remotely across a predominantly digital workplace. The only physical office/place-of-work is our Stuart Refurbishing Facility in Townsville. Our approach to workplace health and safety at this facility is outlined in the annexed Workplace Health & Safety (WHS) Plan (refer Annexure 1). The Chief Executive Officer and the Warehouse & Logistics Lead are responsible for periodical review of this Plan, to be escalated to the Policy & Risk Committee.

In all workplaces, digital or physical, we are committed to ensuring a safe, inclusive, and accessible working environment for all staff. The Code of Conduct (Staff) and Human Resources Policy & Procedures Manual outline behavioural standards expected of all staff. Further provisions are detailed in the Workplace Harassment, Discrimination & Bullying Guidelines which all staff must adhere to.

3 – DOMESTIC TRAVEL

a. Approving & Booking Domestic Travel

Domestic travel includes all travel within Australia outside of a staff member's normal place of business for the purposes of business development, events, or program delivery.

All staff must complete **Form 2.2 – Domestic Travel Request Form**. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for approving domestic travel with consideration given to budget, objectives and timelines. The Chief Executive Officer may authorise their own domestic travel, however **Form 2.2 – Domestic Travel Request Form** must still be completed and provided to the Board of Directors each quarter.

Once the request is approved, staff must then instruct the Executive Assistant to make the appropriate flight and hotel bookings. Flights should be procured from Flight Centre, our corporate travel partner, or Webjet (for short notice bookings). Hotels should be procured through Hotels.com and be within the price range below:

Table 1 – Domestic Travel (Hotels: Acceptable Price Ranges)	
City	Acceptable Price Range
Townsville	\$160 to \$230
Cairns	\$200 to \$300
Brisbane	\$230 to \$320
Sydney	\$230 to \$320
Melbourne	\$230 to \$320
Canberra	\$250 to \$350
Adelaide	\$220 to \$310
Hobart	\$200 to \$300
Perth	\$230 to \$320

For cities and towns not listed above, market analysis should be conducted to select an appropriate hotel. Staff may spend up to \$150 per day for meals and incidentals incurred during the normal course of business.

When travelling in remote locations or driving, staff must check-in every six hours either via a message or phone call to a staff member. A Starlink remote connectivity unit is carried by staff in Papua New Guinea and Australia when driving into very remote areas. For metropolitan travel, this timeframe is revised to every twelve hours.

b. Road Safety/Driving Guidelines

LiteHaus International has identified risks associated with driving in remote areas and long distances in both Australia and Papua New Guinea in the Consolidated Risk Management Plan. Prior to driving, staff must advise their manager of details relating to their journey (estimated departure time, arrival time, route), as well as assess the road and weather conditions. Where an official weather warning is declared prior to the time of departure, the manager may prevent the staff member from conduct the travel. Below are driving guidelines which all staff must strictly adhere to:

- **Mandatory Rest Periods:** Drivers must adhere to legally mandated rest periods as per Australian road regulations. This includes regular breaks during long journeys to prevent fatigue.

- Maximum Driving Hours: The standard maximum driving time is 12 hours in any 24-hour period.
 - Mandatory Rest Breaks: After driving for 5.5 hours, drivers must take a minimum 30-minute rest break.
 - Consecutive Work Days: Drivers must have a minimum of 7 consecutive hours of continuous rest in any 24-hour period.
- Limit Driving Hours: Drivers should not exceed the maximum allowable driving hours as prescribed by Australian transportation laws. This helps prevent fatigue-related accidents.
- Fatigue Management: Drivers must recognise signs of fatigue and take appropriate breaks when necessary. If feeling drowsy, drivers should pull over in a safe location and rest until they are fit to continue driving.
- No Alcohol or Drugs: Consumption of alcohol or any form of impairing drugs before or during driving is strictly prohibited.
- Seatbelt Policy: All occupants of company vehicles must wear seatbelts at all times while the vehicle is in motion.
- Speed Limits: Drivers must adhere to posted speed limits and drive at a safe and appropriate speed considering road conditions, weather, and traffic.
- Mobile Phone Usage: Use of mobile phones, including texting or talking without hands-free devices, is prohibited while driving.
- Vehicle Maintenance: Regular maintenance checks should be conducted on company vehicles to ensure they are in safe operating condition.
- Journey Planning: Drivers should plan their journeys in advance, considering factors such as distance, expected travel time, and rest stops along the route.
- Emergency Preparedness: Drivers should be familiar with emergency procedures, including what to do in the event of an accident or breakdown. All company vehicles must be equipped with a fire extinguisher, tools, first aid kit, two-way radio, and drinking water.
- Weather Awareness: Drivers must be vigilant of changing weather conditions and adjust driving behaviour accordingly.

4 – INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

a. Approving & Booking International Travel

International travel includes all travel beyond national borders of a staff member's normal place of business for the purposes of business development, events, or program delivery.

All staff must complete **Form 2.1 – International Travel Request Form**, which includes the budget, itinerary and justification for travel. This must be accompanied by **Form 1.1 – International Travel Risk Assessment** which is country-specific and based on Australian Government travel advice on Smarttraveller.gov. All travel requests

LiteHaus International is committed to ensuring that travellers are well prepared to conduct international travel in a safe, culturally-sensitive and responsible manner. Prior to travel, the traveller must complete review the relevant Country Briefs (refer Annexure 2) and speak to their manager should they have any questions or concerns. The Country Briefs aim to inform the traveller of basic details, history, current affairs, and cultural best practices for each country we operate in. The Country Briefs are updated every 6 months to ensure that travel advice is relevant.

The traveller must also subscribe to Smarttraveller.gov's newsletter and alerts on the relevant destinations to ensure they are up-to-date with current travel warnings.

The traveller must then complete **Form 1.2 – International Travel Risk Waiver** which should be sent to the Executive Assistant and the Chief Executive Officer. Travellers must also confirm that they have the International Travel Emergency Situation Responses readily accessible either in printed form or saved to their phones, offline.

All international travel requests must be sent to the Chief Executive Officer for review before going to the Board of Directors for approval. The Board of Directors must approve all travel, including that of the Chief Executive Officer.

The Board of Directors will, at minimum, consider:

- Budget – does the travel represent value for money? Is there room in the budget?
- Risk Management – are the risks of travel being mitigated to an acceptable level to justify the travel?
- Time – does the travel represent value for time, without adversely affecting operations or the staff member's energy and mental health?

Once approved, the travel request will then be given to the Executive Assistant to make the appropriate flight and hotel bookings. Flights should be procured from Flight Centre, our corporate travel partner, or Webjet (for short notice bookings). Hotels should be procured through Hotels.com, where possible, and be within the price range below:

Table 1 – International Travel (Hotels: Acceptable Price Ranges)	
City	Acceptable Price Range
Port Moresby, Lae or Mt Hagen (PNG)	\$240 to \$350
Nadi or Suva (Fiji)	\$230 to \$330
Manila (Philippines)	\$120 to \$210
Domestic cities (Philippines)	\$70 to \$170
Phnom Penh (Cambodia)	\$130 to \$230
Bangkok (Thailand)	\$150 to \$250
Tarawa (Kiribati)	\$100 to \$200
Apia (Samoa)	\$230 to \$330
Honiara (Solomon Islands)	\$230 to \$330
Dili (Timor-Leste)	\$140 to \$240

For cities and towns not listed above, market analysis should be conducted to select an appropriate hotel. Staff may spend up to \$150 per day for meals and incidentals incurred during the normal course of business. Receipts from all expenses must be kept, however, the company does acknowledge that in some remote locations, receipts may not be available. Every endeavour must be made by the traveller to secure a receipt for each expense.

b. Travel Insurance

All international travellers must be covered by comprehensive travel insurance, at the company's expense, prior to departure, without exception.

The chosen policy must include unlimited coverage for medical expenses and \$3 million coverage for personal liability. This should be booked by the Executive Assistant using Flight Centre's travel insurance service and a copy of the traveller's Certificate of Insurance kept on file. The traveller must also carry a copy, either physical or digital offline, of their Certificate of Insurance for the duration of their travel.

c. International Travel Emergency Situation Responses

LiteHaus International has prepared the annexed International Travel Emergency Situation Responses (refer Annexure 2) to assist in enabling an immediate, appropriate and effective response as emergencies arise.

The responses cover the following which are relevant to our operating geography:

1. Medical Emergency
2. Civil Unrest/Act of Terror/Armed Conflict
3. Natural Disaster
 - a. Earthquake
 - b. Cyclone/Flooding
4. Staff Member Missing
5. Violent Crime Against Staff
6. Lost Passport

The responses are informed by Australian Government's advice on [Smarttraveller.gov](https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/).

FORM 1.2 – INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL RISK WAIVER

1.0 – BASIC INFORMATION	
Traveller's Name	
Traveller's Role	
Country of Travel	
Travel Dates	

I hereby acknowledge and understand that I will be travelling to the [COUNTRY] on behalf of LiteHaus International. I have reviewed, understand, and accept the risks detailed in the relevant Country Brief provided by LiteHaus International.

I acknowledge that LiteHaus International has provided me with information, guidance, and Cultural Sensitivity Training to minimise risks. However, I am aware that some risks are beyond their control.

I release LiteHaus International, its directors, officers, and employees from any claims or causes of action arising from my travel to the [COUNTRY]. I agree to indemnify and hold them harmless from any losses, damages, claims, and expenses arising from my travel.

I have read and fully understand this International Travel Risk Waiver and sign it voluntarily.

2.0 – AGREEMENT	
Name	
Date	
Signature	

FORM 2.1 – INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL REQUEST

1.0 – BASIC INFORMATION	
Traveller Name	
Destination (s)	
Dates	
Budget	

2.0 – ITINERARY	
Date	Activity

3.0 – JUSTIFICATION

Proposed Outcome

International travel undertaken by the CEO and operational personnel is subject to approval by the Board of Directors as detailed in the Delegation of Authority document.

Approval to travel as detailed above is sought.

FORM 2.2 - DOMESTIC TRAVEL REQUEST

1.0 – BASIC INFORMATION

Traveller Name	
Destination (s)	
Dates	
Budget	

2.0 – ITINERARY

Date	Activity

3.0 – JUSTIFICATION

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Prepared by:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date Signed: _____

Approved by:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date Signed: _____

COUNTRY BRIEF – PAPUA NEW GUINEA

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 10.12 million (World Bank estimate)

Capital City: Port Moresby

Official Languages: English, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu

Dialling Code: +675

Currency: Papua New Guinean Kina (PGK)

Time Zone: UTC+10

Human Development Index: 158th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- Papua New Guinea is home to over 800 distinct languages, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world.
- The country's national emblem, the bird of paradise, is featured on its flag and is renowned for its vibrant plumage and elaborate courtship displays.
- Mount Wilhelm, the highest peak in Papua New Guinea, rises to an elevation of 4,509 meters (14,793 feet) and offers stunning views of the surrounding landscape.
- Traditional Papua New Guinean music is characterized by intricate rhythms and melodic chanting, often accompanied by instruments such as drums and bamboo flutes.
- Papua New Guinea's biodiversity is unparalleled, with an estimated 5% of the world's total species found within its borders, including rare and endemic flora and fauna.

HISTORY

Pre-history: Indigenous peoples inhabit the island of New Guinea and surrounding islands for thousands of years, mastering agriculture independent of other civilisational influence.

1884: Papua New Guinea becomes a British colony known as British New Guinea, while the western half of the island falls under Dutch control.

Late 19th Century: European colonial powers establish control over various parts of the island, leading to the exploitation of natural resources and the introduction of Christianity.

1914-1918: During World War I, Australian forces occupy German New Guinea (northeastern Papua New Guinea) and administer it as a League of Nations mandate.

1930-1934 : Europeans make 'first contact' with the civilisations of the Highlands.

1942-1945: World War II transforms Papua New Guinea into a significant battleground in the Pacific theatre. Japanese forces invade the northern coast, leading to fierce battles, notably along the Kokoda Track. Papua New Guineans, known as "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels," provide crucial support to Allied forces.

1949: Australian administration of Papua and New Guinea begins, with the two territories administered separately until 1975.

1950s-1960s: Decolonisation movements gain momentum, leading to increased calls for self-government and independence.

1973: Papua New Guinea achieves self-government, marking a significant step towards independence.

1975: Papua New Guinea gains full independence from Australia on September 16, with Michael Somare becoming the country's first Prime Minister.

1975-1997: Following independence, Papua New Guinea faces challenges including political instability, ethnic tensions, and economic disparities. Prime Minister Michael Somare's government focuses on nation-building and infrastructure development, but internal conflicts and corruption hinder progress.

1997: The Sandline affair erupts, revealing a scandal involving the government's hiring of foreign mercenaries to quell a rebellion on Bougainville Island. The incident prompts widespread condemnation and calls for political reform.

2000s: Papua New Guinea experiences continued political turbulence, with changes in leadership and allegations of corruption. Economic growth is hampered by factors such as weak governance, inadequate infrastructure, and reliance on extractive industries.

2011: The Papua New Guinea Sustainable Development Program (PNGSDP) is established, aiming to promote sustainable development and social progress through responsible resource management.

2018: Papua New Guinea hosts the APEC Summit.

2019: Prime Minister Peter O'Neill resigns amid pressure over corruption allegations, leading to a change in leadership. The new government faces the challenge of addressing public discontent and restoring confidence in governance institutions.

2024: On January 10th, Port Moresby faced the most serious and damaging rioting and civil unrest in the nation's history. Prime Minister James Marape avoids five votes of no confidence attempts.

ECONOMY

Papua New Guinea's economy is characterised by its rich endowment of natural resources, including minerals, forests, and marine resources. The country's abundant natural wealth forms the backbone of its economy, with industries such as mining, petroleum, and agriculture playing key roles in driving economic growth and development.

Mining is a major contributor to Papua New Guinea's economy, with significant reserves of gold, copper, and other minerals. The country is home to large-scale mining operations such as Porgera gold mine and Ok Tedi copper mine, which generate substantial export revenue and employment.

Petroleum also plays a vital role in Papua New Guinea's economy, with the country possessing substantial reserves of oil and natural gas. The development of liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, such as the ExxonMobil-led PNG LNG project, has boosted government revenue.

Agriculture remains a crucial sector, employing a significant portion of the population and contributing to rural livelihoods. Cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, palm oil, and copra are major export commodities, while subsistence farming also plays a vital role in ensuring food security.

However, Papua New Guinea's economy faces challenges such as limited infrastructure, governance issues, and vulnerability to external shocks. Efforts to promote economic diversification, improve infrastructure, and strengthen governance are essential for sustaining economic growth and enhancing the well-being of Papua New Guinea's population.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Papua New Guinea boasts a remarkably diverse cultural landscape, with over 800 distinct languages and a rich tapestry of indigenous traditions and customs. This cultural diversity is a testament to the country's long history of human settlement and interaction, with each linguistic group and ethnic community contributing to the vibrant mosaic of Papua New Guinean society.

Traditional cultural practices are deeply ingrained in the fabric of daily life, encompassing rituals, ceremonies, art forms, and oral traditions passed down through generations. From the highlands to the coast, Papua New Guinea's diverse regions are home to a myriad of cultural expressions, each reflecting the unique histories, beliefs, and environments of its inhabitants.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Touching someone's head:** In many Papua New Guinean cultures, the head is considered sacred, and touching it without permission is disrespectful.
- **Entering a village without permission:** Always seek permission from local elders before entering a village or community area, out of respect for traditional authority and customs.
- **Disrespecting sacred sites:** Avoid disrespecting or disturbing sacred sites, such as ceremonial or burial grounds as these hold deep cultural significance for local communities.
- **Public displays of affection:** Public displays of affection, such as kissing or hugging, may be considered inappropriate, so it's best to avoid them in public settings.
- **Dressing immodestly:** Dress modestly, especially when visiting rural areas or participating in cultural events, to show respect for local customs and traditions.
- **Using offensive language or gestures:** Avoid using offensive language or gestures, as these can easily cause offense and misunderstandings, even if unintentional.
- **Refusing food or gifts:** In many Papua New Guinean cultures, food is highly valued, so wasting food or refusing offerings can be seen as disrespectful. Equally, Papua New Guinean culture places prestige on generosity, so avoid refusing small gifts.
- **Disrespecting elders or authority figures:** Show respect for elders and authority figures, as they hold significant influence, and disrespecting them can be deeply offensive.
- **Discussing politics:** Ensure that dialogue about politics are respectful and inquisitive. Papua New Guineans are very passionate about politics and their system is intricate.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Papua New Guinea presents several health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- Malaria: Papua New Guinea has a high prevalence of malaria, particularly in rural and remote areas. Travelers should take antimalarial medication, use insect repellent, and sleep under mosquito nets to prevent infection.
- Waterborne Diseases: Contaminated water sources can lead to diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis A. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water, avoid consuming raw or undercooked food, and practice good hygiene habits.
- Dengue Fever: Dengue fever is transmitted by mosquitoes and is prevalent in urban and semi-urban areas. Travelers should use insect repellent, wear protective clothing, and avoid areas with standing water to reduce the risk of infection.
- Tuberculosis (TB): Papua New Guinea has a high incidence of tuberculosis, particularly in overcrowded urban areas and among indigenous populations. Travelers should avoid close contact with individuals displaying symptoms of TB and consider getting vaccinated before travel.
- HIV/AIDS: Papua New Guinea has a relatively high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, particularly among certain high-risk groups. Travelers should take precautions to prevent exposure.
- Rabies: Rabies is present in Papua New Guinea, and travellers should avoid contact with stray animals. Pre-exposure rabies vaccination may be recommended for those at higher risk of exposure, such as veterinarians or wildlife researchers.
- Diarrheal Illnesses: Travelers to Papua New Guinea may be at risk of contracting diarrheal illnesses, such as traveller's diarrhea, due to poor sanitation and hygiene practices. It's essential to wash hands regularly, avoid street food, and consume only well-cooked food.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Papua New Guinea presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- Crime: Papua New Guinea has high crime rates, particularly in urban areas such as Port Moresby and Lae. Travelers should remain vigilant and avoid displaying valuables, such as electronics, in public. Traveling in groups and using reputable transportation providers can also help reduce the risk of becoming a victim of crime.
- Civil Unrest: Political tensions and social unrest occasionally lead to protests and demonstrations, which can turn violent. Travelers should avoid large gatherings, monitor local media for updates on the situation, and follow the advice of local authorities.
- Road Safety: Road conditions in Papua New Guinea can be poor, with limited infrastructure and hazardous driving practices. Travelers should exercise caution when driving or using public transportation, particularly at night, and avoid traveling on isolated roads after dark.
- Natural Disasters: Papua New Guinea is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and tropical cyclones. Travelers should familiarize themselves with emergency procedures and evacuation routes, monitor local weather reports, and follow the advice of local authorities in the event of a natural disaster.
- Healthcare Facilities: Access to healthcare facilities in Papua New Guinea can be limited, particularly in remote areas. Always carry a basic first-aid kit with essential medications.
- Tribal Conflict: Inter-tribal conflict occasionally occurs in remote areas of Papua New Guinea, particularly in the Highlands region. Travelers should completely avoid getting involved in disputes between local communities and respect local customs and traditions to minimise the risk of confrontation.

COUNTRY BRIEF – SOLOMON ISLANDS

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 724,000

Capital City: Honiara

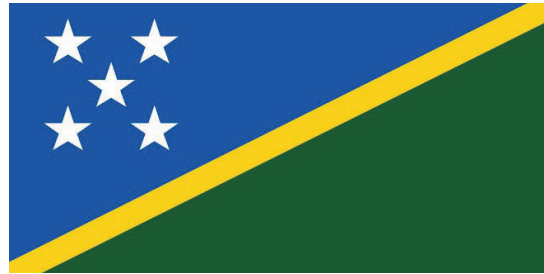
Official Languages: English, Pijin

Dialling Code: +677

Currency: Solomon Islands Dollar (SBD)

Time Zone: UTC+11

Human Development Index: 157th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- The Solomon Islands is home to over 70 distinct languages, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world.
- The country's national emblem, the dolphin, symbolizes friendship, intelligence, and unity and is featured on its flag.
- Mount Popomanaseu, the highest peak in the Solomon Islands, rises to an elevation of 2,335 meters (7,661 feet) and offers breathtaking views of the surrounding islands.
- Traditional Solomon Islands music is characterized by rhythmic drumming, bamboo flutes, and panpipes, often accompanied by elaborate dance performances.
- Solomon Islands boasts rich biodiversity, with diverse ecosystems including coral reefs, tropical rainforests, and mangrove swamps, supporting a variety of flora and fauna.

HISTORY

Pre-history: Indigenous peoples inhabit the Solomon Islands for thousands of years, developing unique cultures and societies adapted to the islands' environments.

1568: Spanish explorer Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira becomes the first European to sight the Solomon Islands.

Late 19th Century: European colonial powers, including Britain and Germany, establish control over various parts of the Solomon Islands, leading to the exploitation of natural resources and the introduction of Christianity.

1942-1945: During World War II, the Solomon Islands become a battleground between Allied and Japanese forces, with significant battles fought on islands such as Guadalcanal and Bougainville.

1978: The Solomon Islands gain independence from Britain on July 7, with Peter Kenilorea becoming the country's first Prime Minister.

1998-2003: The Solomon Islands experience a period of ethnic tensions and civil unrest, leading to the intervention of Australian-led peacekeeping forces and the establishment of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

2020: The Solomon Islands grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing measures to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its socio-economic effects.

2023: The Solomon Islands hosts the Pacific Games in Honiara.

ECONOMY

The economy of the Solomon Islands is primarily driven by agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and small-scale mining. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy, with the majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming and cash crop cultivation. Key agricultural products include coconuts, cocoa, palm oil, and root crops, which contribute significantly to rural livelihoods and export revenues.

Forestry is a major industry in the Solomon Islands, with timber exports being a significant source of revenue. However, concerns about unsustainable logging practices and deforestation have prompted efforts to promote sustainable forestry management and conservation. The fisheries sector is another important component of the Solomon Islands' economy, with rich marine resources supporting local livelihoods and contributing to export earnings. Tuna is a particularly valuable commodity, with the country's extensive Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) providing lucrative opportunities for commercial fishing and processing.

Mining, although relatively small in scale, also plays a role in the Solomon Islands' economy, with the extraction of minerals such as gold, bauxite, and nickel contributing to export revenues and employment generation.

Tourism has the potential to further diversify the Solomon Islands' economy, with its pristine beaches, coral reefs, and cultural attractions attracting visitors from around the world. However, the tourism industry is still in its nascent stages, facing challenges such as limited infrastructure, transportation, and marketing.

Overall, the Solomon Islands' economy faces challenges such as limited infrastructure, governance issues, vulnerability to external shocks, and dependence on donor aid. Efforts to promote economic diversification, improve infrastructure, and strengthen governance are crucial for sustainable economic development and poverty reduction in the Solomon Islands.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Solomon Islands boasts a rich cultural tapestry, characterized by its diversity of languages, traditions, and customs. With over 70 distinct language groups, it stands as one of the most linguistically diverse countries globally, showcasing the deep-rooted cultural heritage of its people. Traditional practices and customs are integral to Solomon Islands' cultural identity, with each ethnic group contributing unique elements to the collective cultural mosaic. From shell money exchange to panpipe music and elaborate dance performances, the cultural expressions of the Solomon Islands reflect centuries of shared history and cultural exchange.

The islands' cultural diversity is further enriched by the presence of various indigenous groups, each with its own distinct traditions and beliefs. Whether it's the Malaitan woodcarvers renowned for their intricate designs or the choirs of the Western Province performing traditional melodies, the Solomon Islands' cultural landscape is a vibrant tapestry of creativity and expression.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Entering a village without permission:** Always seek permission from local elders before entering a village or community area, out of respect for traditional authority and customs.
- **Disrespecting sacred sites:** Avoid disrespecting or disturbing sacred sites, such as ceremonial grounds, as these hold deep cultural significance for local communities.
- **Public displays of affection:** Public displays of affection, such as kissing or hugging, may be considered inappropriate, so it's best to avoid them in public settings.
- **Dressing immodestly:** Dress modestly, especially when visiting rural areas or participating in cultural events, to show respect for local customs and traditions.
- **Using offensive language or gestures:** Avoid using offensive language or gestures, as these can easily cause offense and misunderstandings, even if unintentional.
- **Refusing food or gifts:** In many Solomon Islands cultures, food is highly valued, so wasting food or refusing offerings can be seen as disrespectful. Equally, Solomon Islanders value generosity, so avoid refusing small gifts.
- **Disrespecting elders or authority figures:** Show respect for elders and authority figures, as they hold significant influence, and disrespecting them can be deeply offensive.
- **Discussing politics:** Ensure that dialogue about politics is respectful and inquisitive. Solomon Islanders are passionate about politics, and their system is intricate.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Papua New Guinea presents several health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Malaria:** The Solomon Islands have a high prevalence of malaria, especially in rural and remote areas. Travelers should take antimalarial medication, use insect repellent, and sleep under mosquito nets to prevent infection.
- **Waterborne Diseases:** Contaminated water sources can lead to diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis A. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water, avoid consuming raw or undercooked food, and practice good hygiene habits.
- **Dengue Fever:** Dengue fever is transmitted by mosquitoes and is prevalent in urban and semi-urban areas. Travelers should use insect repellent, wear protective clothing, and avoid areas with standing water to reduce the risk of infection.
- **Tuberculosis (TB):** The Solomon Islands have a high incidence of tuberculosis, particularly in overcrowded urban areas and among indigenous populations. Travelers should avoid close contact with individuals displaying symptoms of TB and consider getting vaccinated before travel.

- HIV/AIDS: The Solomon Islands have a relatively high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, particularly among certain high-risk groups. Travelers should take precautions to prevent exposure to the virus, such as practicing safe sex and avoiding sharing needles or other injecting equipment.
- Rabies: Rabies is present in the Solomon Islands, and travelers should avoid contact with stray animals. Pre-exposure rabies vaccination may be recommended for those at higher risk of exposure, such as veterinarians or wildlife researchers.
- Diarrheal Illnesses: Travelers to the Solomon Islands may be at risk of contracting diarrheal illnesses, such as traveler's diarrhea, due to poor sanitation and hygiene practices. It's essential to wash hands regularly, avoid street food, and consume only well-cooked food and beverages.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Solomon Islands presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- Crime: The Solomon Islands experience high crime rates, particularly in urban areas such as Honiara. Travelers should remain vigilant, avoid displaying valuables in public, and use reputable transportation providers.
- Civil Unrest: Political tensions and social unrest can occasionally lead to protests and demonstrations, which may turn violent. Travelers should avoid large gatherings, monitor local media for updates on the situation, and follow the advice of local authorities.
- Road Safety: Road conditions in the Solomon Islands can be poor, with limited infrastructure and hazardous driving practices. Travelers should exercise caution when driving or using public transportation, particularly at night, and avoid traveling on isolated roads after dark.
- Natural Disasters: The Solomon Islands are prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and tropical cyclones. Travelers should familiarize themselves with emergency procedures and evacuation routes, monitor local weather reports, and follow the advice of local authorities in the event of a natural disaster.
- Healthcare Facilities: Access to healthcare facilities in the Solomon Islands can be limited, particularly in rural and remote areas. Travelers should ensure they have adequate travel insurance that covers medical evacuation and treatment abroad and carry a basic first-aid kit with essential medications.
- Tribal Conflict: Inter-tribal conflict occasionally occurs in remote areas of the Solomon Islands. Travelers should avoid getting involved in disputes between local communities and respect local customs and traditions to minimize the risk of confrontation.
- Maritime Safety: Travelers should exercise caution when traveling by boat or ferry in the Solomon Islands, as safety standards may not always be strictly enforced. It's essential to use reputable operators and ensure that life jackets and other safety equipment are available and in good condition.

COUNTRY BRIEF – SAMOA

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 223,000

Capital City: Apia

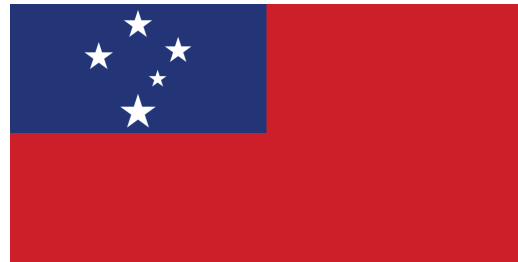
Official Languages: Samoan, English

Dialling Code: +685

Currency: Samoan Tala (WST)

Time Zone: UTC+13

Human Development Index: 116th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- Samoa is one of the first places in the world to welcome each new day due to its location near the International Date Line. In 2011, Samoa made a significant adjustment to its time zone, effectively skipping December 30th, 2011, and moving directly from December 29th to December 31st to better align with its economic partners in Australia and Asia.

- Samoa is often referred to as the "Cradle of Polynesia" for its rich Polynesian heritage. Coconuts are a significant part of Samoan culture, economy, and diet. They use coconut in almost everything, from food and drinks to building materials and traditional medicine.
- The waters surrounding Samoa are home to some of the largest living organisms on the planet, the giant clams. These massive bivalves can weigh up to 440 pounds (200 kilograms) and can live for over 100 years.
- Rugby is not just a sport in Samoa; it's a way of life. The national team, known as the Manu Samoa, is a source of immense pride for the country. Despite being a small nation, Samoa has produced some world-renowned rugby players who have made their mark on the international stage.
- Samoa is famous for its traditional tattoo art called "Pe'a" for men and "Malu" for women. These tattoos are not only symbols of beauty but also of cultural identity and status. The process of receiving a Pe'a or Malu is lengthy and painful, but it holds deep cultural significance and is seen as a rite of passage for many Samoans.

HISTORY

1000 BCE-AD 1000: The Lapita people, believed to be the ancestors of modern Polynesians, settle in the islands of Samoa and begin to develop a unique Polynesian culture, characterized by seafaring, agriculture, and complex social structures.

1830s-1899: Samoa undergoes a period of colonial rule and influence. Initially, the islands are divided between various European powers, including Germany, Britain, and the United States.

1899: The Tripartite Convention divides Samoa between Germany and the United States. The western part becomes German Samoa (later known as Western Samoa, and eventually, simply Samoa), while the eastern part becomes American Samoa.

1914: New Zealand occupies German Samoa during World War I and administers it under a League of Nations mandate. This marks the beginning of New Zealand's administration of the islands.

1962: Western Samoa gains independence from New Zealand and becomes the Independent State of Samoa. Malietoa Tanumafili II becomes the first head of state.

1970s-1980s: Samoa undergoes economic development and political stability under the leadership of Prime Minister Tupuola Efi and Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana.

1997: Tofilau Eti Alesana resigns as Prime Minister due to health reasons, and Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi becomes Prime Minister. Malielegaoi's leadership continues into the 21st century, making him one of the longest-serving Prime Ministers in the Pacific region.

2009: Samoa switches from driving on the right side of the road to the left, aligning with neighboring Australia and New Zealand. This change is aimed at facilitating easier access to second-hand vehicles from these countries.

2011: Samoa changes its time zone by moving from the west side of the International Date Line to the east, effectively skipping December 30th and moving directly to December 31st. This change is made to better align with its trading partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

2019: Samoa faces a measles outbreak, leading to a state of emergency being declared. The government launches a mass vaccination campaign to contain the outbreak.

ECONOMY

Samoa's economy is characterised by a mix of traditional agriculture, tourism, and remittances from Samoans living abroad. Agriculture, particularly the cultivation of taro, coconut, and cocoa, remains a significant sector, providing livelihoods for many Samoans and contributing to food security. The country also exports agricultural products such as coconut cream and fish.

Tourism plays a vital role in Samoa's economy, with its pristine beaches, lush rainforests, and vibrant Polynesian culture attracting visitors from around the world. The tourism industry provides employment opportunities and generates revenue through accommodation, tours, and cultural experiences.

Remittances from Samoans living overseas, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, are a crucial source of income for many families in Samoa. These remittances contribute to household incomes, support small businesses, and help alleviate poverty.

In recent years, Samoa has also been focusing on developing its renewable energy sector, aiming to reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Initiatives such as solar power projects and energy efficiency programs are being implemented to promote sustainability and resilience in the face of environmental challenges.

Overall, while Samoa faces economic challenges such as limited natural resources and vulnerability to external shocks, the country's diverse economy and efforts towards sustainable development position it for continued growth and resilience in the future.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Samoa's culture is deeply rooted in its Polynesian heritage, characterized by a rich tapestry of traditions, customs, and values passed down through generations. Family and community play central roles in Samoan society, with strong familial ties and communal living structures shaping daily life.

One of the most prominent aspects of Samoan culture is fa'a Samoa, or "the Samoan way." Fa'a Samoa encompasses various cultural practices, including language, dance, music, and oral storytelling, all of which serve to preserve and celebrate the unique identity of the Samoan people.

Traditional Samoan tattooing, known as tatau, holds significant cultural and spiritual significance. Both men and women undergo elaborate tattooing rituals that symbolize their heritage, status, and life journey.

Samoa's cuisine reflects the islands' abundance of natural resources, with staples such as taro, coconut, breadfruit, and seafood featuring prominently in traditional dishes. Food plays a central role in social gatherings and ceremonies, fostering a sense of community and hospitality.

Music and dance are integral parts of Samoan culture, with traditional performances showcasing intricate movements, vibrant costumes, and rhythmic drumming. The siva, or Samoan dance, is often accompanied by singing and storytelling, conveying narratives of love, war, and mythology.

Despite modern influences, Samoa remains committed to preserving its cultural heritage, with efforts to revitalize traditional practices and pass on ancestral knowledge to future generations. Through its vibrant culture, Samoa continues to captivate and inspire people around the world, offering a glimpse into the enduring spirit of the Samoan people.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Entering a village without permission:** Always seek permission from local elders before entering a village or community area, out of respect for traditional authority and customs.

- **Avoid disrespecting elders:** Show deference and respect to elders, as age is highly revered in Samoan culture. Refrain from speaking or acting in a disrespectful manner towards older individuals.
- **Don't wear revealing clothing in public:** Samoa is a conservative society, so avoid wearing clothing that is too revealing, particularly when visiting villages or attending traditional ceremonies.
- **Don't refuse food or drink:** If offered food or drink by a host, it's considered polite to accept, even if you're not hungry or thirsty. Refusing hospitality can be seen as disrespectful.
- **Avoid touching people's heads:** In Samoan culture, the head is considered sacred, so avoid touching someone's head, even playfully. This gesture can be considered offensive.
- **Don't point with your fingers:** Pointing with your fingers is considered impolite in Samoan culture. Instead, use your chin or gesture with an open hand.
- **Avoid raising your voice or showing anger publicly:** Public displays of anger or aggression are frowned upon in Samoan society. Maintain a calm and respectful demeanour, even in challenging situations.
- **Don't step over people or objects:** Avoid stepping over seated individuals or objects on the floor, as this is considered disrespectful. Instead, walk around or ask permission to pass.
- **Avoid discussing sensitive topics:** Refrain from discussing sensitive topics such as politics, religion, or family matters unless invited to do so by your hosts. These subjects can be contentious and may cause offense if not approached with care.
- **Don't enter a fale (traditional house) without permission:** If visiting a village or community, always seek permission before entering a fale. Respect the space and privacy of the residents.
- **Avoid public displays of affection:** Public displays of affection, such as kissing or hugging, are not common in Samoan culture. Show restraint and reserve physical affection for private settings.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Samoa presents health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Infectious diseases:** Travelers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting Samoa. Additionally, hepatitis A and typhoid vaccinations are recommended. It's also essential to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and avoiding contact with sick individuals, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Mosquito-borne diseases:** Samoa is endemic to mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, Zika virus, and chikungunya. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants, and staying in accommodations with screens or air conditioning.
- **Waterborne diseases:** Tap water in Samoa may not be safe for consumption. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming ice cubes or uncooked foods washed in tap water. Additionally, practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands often.
- **Sun exposure:** Samoa's tropical climate means high levels of sun exposure, increasing the risk of sunburn and heat-related illnesses. Travelers should use sunscreen with a high SPF, wear protective clothing, and stay hydrated to avoid sunburn and heatstroke.
- **Coral cuts and marine hazards:** While Samoa's pristine beaches and coral reefs are beautiful, they can pose risks to travellers. Coral cuts and stings from marine creatures like jellyfish or sea urchins are common. Wearing protective footwear while swimming or snorkeling and avoiding contact with marine life can help reduce the risk of injury.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Samoa presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Natural hazards:** Samoa is prone to natural hazards such as cyclones, tsunamis, and earthquakes. Travelers should monitor weather forecasts and follow advice from local authorities in case of severe weather warnings.
- **Ocean hazards:** While Samoa's beaches are beautiful, they can pose risks such as strong currents, rip tides, and sharp coral. Travelers should exercise caution when swimming, snorkeling, or participating in water activities and adhere to safety warnings posted by lifeguards.
- **Petty crime:** While violent crime is rare, petty crime such as theft and pickpocketing can occur, particularly in tourist areas. Travelers should take precautions to safeguard their belongings, such as using a money belt or secure bag and avoiding displaying valuables in public.
- **Road safety:** Road conditions in Samoa may vary, and traffic accidents can occur due to factors such as narrow roads, poor lighting, and reckless driving. Travelers should exercise caution when driving or crossing roads, adhere to local traffic laws, and avoid traveling at night if possible.
- **Alcohol and drug-related incidents:** Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to confrontations or accidents. Travelers should drink responsibly and be aware of their surroundings, particularly in nightlife areas.
- **Cultural sensitivities:** Respect for local customs and traditions is essential in Samoa. Travelers should familiarize themselves with cultural norms and etiquette to avoid causing offense unintentionally.
- **Health-related emergencies:** While Samoa has medical facilities that can provide basic care, serious medical emergencies may require evacuation to a larger medical centre in New Zealand or Australia. Travelers should ensure they have comprehensive travel insurance that covers medical evacuation.

COUNTRY BRIEF – FIJI

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 929,000

Capital City: Suva

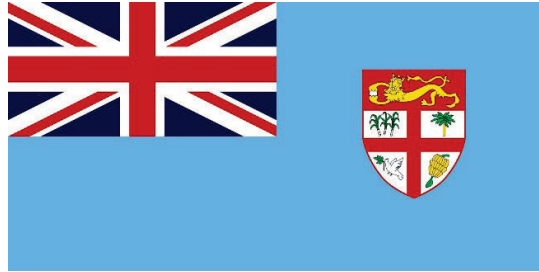
Official Languages: Fijian, English, Fijian Hindi

Dialling Code: +679

Currency: Fijian Dollar (FJD)

Time Zone: UTC+12

Human Development Index: 104th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- Fiji is famous for its natural artesian water, known globally as Fiji Water. Sourced from an aquifer deep within the Yaqara Valley of Viti Levu, Fiji Water is renowned for its purity and mineral content, and it has become one of the leading bottled water brands worldwide.
- Bilibili racing is a traditional Fijian sport where participants race homemade bamboo rafts, called bilibilis, down river rapids. This exhilarating and adrenaline-pumping activity is a popular pastime, especially during festivals and cultural celebrations.
- While Fiji is commonly known for its stunning beaches and crystal-clear waters, many people might not realize that Fiji is made up of 330 islands, each with its own unique charm and character. Only about one-third of these islands are inhabited, offering endless opportunities for exploration and adventure.

- In 2017, Fiji was crowned the "Happiest Country in the World" according to a Gallup International survey. This designation reflects the warm and welcoming nature of the Fijian people, as well as the country's laid-back lifestyle and strong sense of community.
- In Fiji, time operates on its own unique schedule known as "Fiji Time." This relaxed concept of time encourages people to take things slowly, enjoy the moment, and prioritize relationships over punctuality. So if someone tells you they'll meet you at 2 p.m. Fiji Time, don't be surprised if they arrive a little later!

HISTORY

- **Approximately 1500 BCE:** The first inhabitants, believed to be Austronesian-speaking peoples, settle in Fiji, bringing with them agriculture, pottery, and Lapita culture.
- **Late 17th to early 19th century:** Fiji experiences an influx of Polynesian settlers, who establish chiefdoms and engage in warfare with the indigenous Melanesian population.
- **Late 18th century:** European explorers, including Abel Tasman and James Cook, visit Fiji, initiating contact with the indigenous Fijian people.
- **Late 19th century:** Fiji becomes a British colony following the signing of the Deed of Cession in 1874. British rule brings significant changes to Fiji's social, political, and economic landscape, including the introduction of indentured laborers from India to work on sugarcane plantations.
- **1940s:** Fiji plays a significant role in World War II, serving as a military base for Allied forces in the Pacific theater.
- **1960s-1970s:** Calls for independence grow stronger, leading to constitutional changes and the formation of a coalition government comprising both indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians.
- **1970:** Fiji gains independence from Britain on October 10, 1970, and becomes a sovereign nation within the Commonwealth of Nations. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara becomes the country's first Prime Minister.
- **1987:** Fiji experiences its first military coup, led by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who stages two coups in the span of one month. The coups are largely motivated by tensions between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians over political power and representation.
- **1990:** Fiji adopts a new constitution that enshrines ethnic Fijian dominance in politics and limits the rights of Indo-Fijians.
- **2000:** Another coup occurs in Fiji, led by George Speight, resulting in the temporary overthrow of the government and the appointment of an interim administration.
- **2006:** Commodore Frank Bainimarama stages a military coup, ousting the elected government and assuming control of Fiji. Bainimarama subsequently becomes Prime Minister in 2007 following elections held under a new constitution.
- **2014:** Fiji holds democratic elections, leading to Bainimarama's FijiFirst Party winning a majority of seats in parliament. Bainimarama is re-elected as Prime Minister, and Fiji re-establishes itself as a democratic republic.

ECONOMY

Fiji's economy is diverse, driven primarily by tourism, agriculture, and remittances. The tourism sector is a significant contributor to Fiji's economy, attracting millions of visitors each year to its pristine beaches, coral reefs, and lush landscapes. Tourism-related activities, such as accommodation, tours, and dining, generate substantial revenue and employment opportunities for Fijians.

Agriculture also plays a vital role in Fiji's economy, with sugarcane, coconuts, and root crops being the primary agricultural exports. However, the agricultural sector faces challenges such as weather-related risks, limited access to modern farming techniques, and competition from imported goods.

Remittances from Fijians living abroad, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, are another significant source of income for many families in Fiji. These remittances contribute to household incomes, support small businesses, and help alleviate poverty.

In recent years, Fiji has also been focusing on diversifying its economy by promoting sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and financial services. Additionally, investments in infrastructure development and renewable energy projects aim to stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities.

While Fiji's economy shows resilience and potential for growth, challenges such as natural disasters, political instability, and external shocks remain significant factors influencing its economic performance. However, with continued investment in key sectors and efforts to address structural constraints, Fiji aims to achieve sustainable economic development and improve the livelihoods of its people.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Fiji's culture is a vibrant tapestry woven from a diverse array of influences, including indigenous Fijian, Indo-Fijian, European, and other Pacific Island cultures. At its heart lies a deep sense of community, hospitality, and respect for traditional values.

Indigenous Fijian culture, known as iTaukei, is rich in rituals, ceremonies, and oral traditions passed down through generations. Traditional Fijian practices such as meke (dance), yaqona (kava drinking ceremony), and mat weaving are integral parts of everyday life and are often celebrated during festivals and special occasions.

Indo-Fijian culture, brought to Fiji by indentured labourers from India during colonial times, adds another layer of diversity to Fiji's cultural landscape. Indo-Fijians have preserved their language, religion, and culinary traditions, contributing to Fiji's multicultural identity.

Music and dance play a central role in Fijian culture, with traditional instruments such as the lali (wooden drum) and vakalolo (bamboo flute) accompanying lively performances. Fijian music and dance often tell stories of love, war, and ancestral heritage, connecting people to their past and fostering a sense of identity and belonging.

Fiji's cultural heritage is also reflected in its arts and crafts, including wood carving, pottery, and tapa cloth making. These traditional crafts showcase the creativity and craftsmanship of Fijian artisans and are often passed down through families as cherished heirlooms.

Despite modern influences, Fiji remains deeply rooted in its cultural traditions, with efforts to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge, language, and customs. Through its diverse cultural tapestry, Fiji celebrates unity in diversity, embracing the unique contributions of its people and fostering a sense of national pride and identity.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Disrespecting elders:** Show deference and respect to elders, as they hold significant authority and wisdom in Fijian society. Avoid speaking or acting in a disrespectful manner towards older individuals.
- **Disrespecting religious sites:** Fiji is home to various religious communities, and religious sites are considered sacred. Show respect when visiting temples, churches, or mosques by dressing modestly and observing any customs or rituals.
- **Disrespecting the sevusevu:** When visiting a Fijian village, it's customary to present a sevusevu, a gift of kava, to the village chief as a sign of respect and gratitude. Failure to present a sevusevu or showing disrespect during the ceremony can cause offense.

- **Touching someone's head:** In Fijian culture, the head is considered sacred, and touching someone's head, especially without permission, is seen as disrespectful. Avoid this gesture to prevent causing offense.
- **Wearing revealing clothing in villages or sacred sites:** Fijian villages and sacred sites have conservative dress codes, and revealing clothing may be considered inappropriate or offensive. Dress modestly when visiting these locations out of respect for local customs and beliefs.
- **Pointing with fingers:** Pointing with fingers is considered impolite in Fijian culture. Instead, use an open hand or gesture with your chin to indicate direction or objects.
- **Disrespecting traditional ceremonies or rituals:** Fijian culture is rich in traditional ceremonies and rituals, such as meke (dance) performances and yaqona (kava) ceremonies. Show respect by observing quietly and refraining from disruptive behavior.
- **Disrespecting the environment:** Fijians have a strong connection to their natural surroundings, and disrespecting the environment, such as littering or damaging coral reefs, is seen as offensive. Practice responsible tourism by leaving no trace and following local guidelines for environmental conservation.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Fiji presents health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Mosquito-borne diseases:** Fiji is endemic to mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, Zika virus, and chikungunya. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants, and staying in accommodations with screens or air conditioning.
- **Waterborne diseases:** Tap water in Fiji may not be safe for consumption. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming ice cubes or uncooked foods washed in tap water. Additionally, practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, can help prevent waterborne illnesses like gastroenteritis.
- **Sun exposure:** Fiji's tropical climate means high levels of sun exposure, increasing the risk of sunburn and heat-related illnesses. Travelers should use sunscreen with a high SPF, wear protective clothing, and stay hydrated to avoid sunburn and heatstroke.
- **Coral cuts and marine hazards:** While Fiji's coral reefs are stunning, they can pose risks such as coral cuts and stings from marine creatures like jellyfish or sea urchins. Travelers should wear protective footwear while swimming or snorkeling and avoid contact with marine life.
- **Infectious diseases:** Travelers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting Fiji. Additionally, hepatitis A and typhoid vaccinations are recommended. It's also essential to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and avoiding contact with sick individuals, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Rabies:** While rare, rabies does exist in Fiji. Travelers should avoid contact with stray animals and seek medical attention immediately if bitten or scratched by an animal.
- **Medical facilities:** While medical facilities in Fiji are adequate for routine care, they may be limited in more remote areas. Travelers should ensure they have comprehensive travel insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of serious illness or injury.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Fiji presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Natural hazards:** Fiji is prone to natural hazards such as cyclones, tsunamis, and earthquakes. Travelers should monitor weather forecasts and follow advice from local authorities in case of severe weather warnings.
- **Ocean hazards:** While Fiji's beaches are beautiful, they can pose risks such as strong currents, rip tides, and sharp coral. Travelers should exercise caution when swimming, snorkeling, or participating in water activities and adhere to safety warnings posted by lifeguards.
- **Petty crime:** While violent crime is rare, petty crime such as theft and pickpocketing can occur, particularly in tourist areas. Travelers should take precautions to safeguard their belongings, such as using a money belt or secure bag and avoiding displaying valuables in public.
- **Road safety:** Road conditions in Fiji may vary, and traffic accidents can occur due to factors such as narrow roads, poor lighting, and reckless driving. Travelers should exercise caution when driving or crossing roads, adhere to local traffic laws, and avoid traveling at night if possible.
- **Alcohol and drug-related incidents:** Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to confrontations or accidents. Travelers should drink responsibly and be aware of their surroundings, particularly in nightlife areas.

COUNTRY BRIEF – KIRIBATI

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 131,000

Capital City: Tarawa

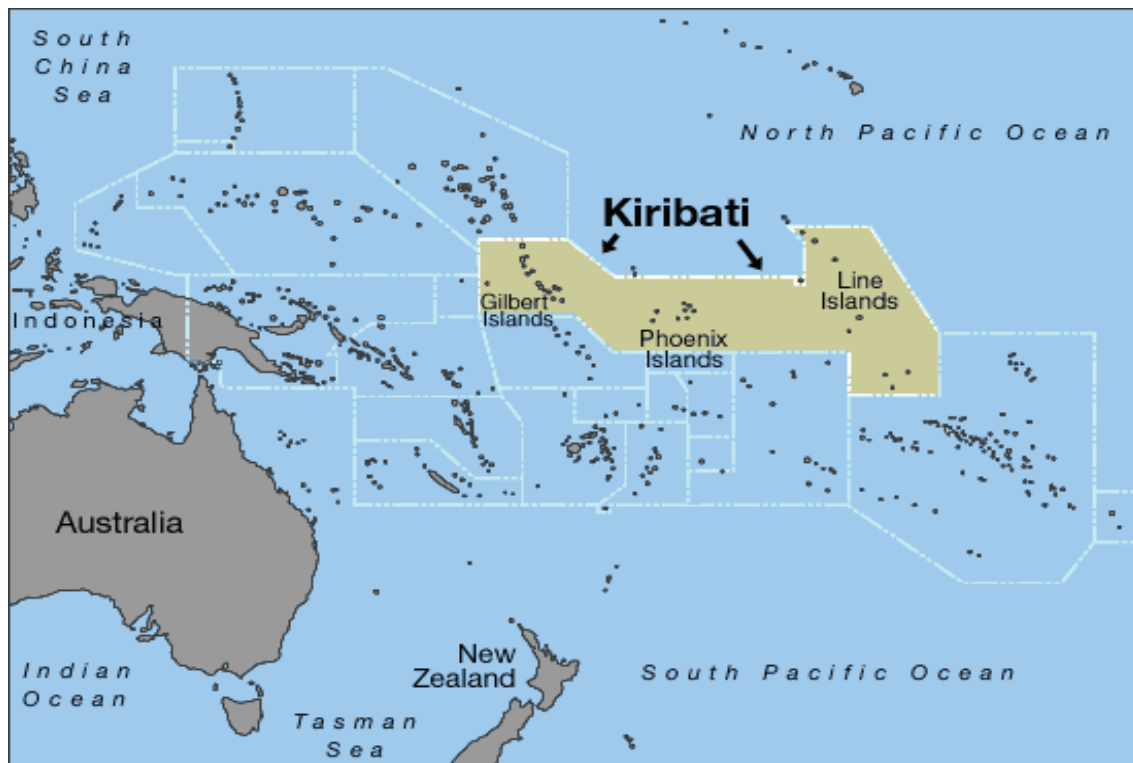
Official Languages: English, Gilbertese

Dialling Code: +679

Currency: Australian Dollar (AUD)

Time Zone: UTC+12, +13, +14

Human Development Index: 137th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- **Land of the Phoenix Islands:** Kiribati is home to the Phoenix Islands, a group of eight atolls and two submerged coral reefs known for their pristine and untouched natural beauty. The Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) is one of the world's largest marine protected areas, spanning over 400,000 square kilometres (150,000 square miles).
- **International Date Line:** The Republic of Kiribati extends across three of the world's time zones and straddles the International Date Line, making it one of the first places in the world to see each new day. The country's easternmost islands are among the first to greet the sunrise.

- **Bouquet of Islands:** Kiribati consists of 33 coral atolls and reef islands spread over 3.5 million square kilometres (1.3 million square miles) of the Pacific Ocean. Despite its vast maritime territory, Kiribati's total land area is relatively small, making it one of the world's largest nations by exclusive economic zone (EEZ) but one of the smallest by land area.
- **Floating Paradise:** The isolated atolls of Kiribati are known for their stunning turquoise lagoons, abundant marine life, and world-class diving and snorkelling opportunities. Visitors can explore colourful coral reefs, swim with tropical fish, and relax on pristine white-sand beaches in this remote Pacific paradise.
- **Innovative Solutions to Climate Change:** Kiribati is one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including sea-level rise and extreme weather events. Despite its challenges, Kiribati is at the forefront of innovative solutions, such as floating islands and coastal adaptation projects, to address the effects of climate change and ensure the resilience of its communities.

HISTORY

- **1000-200 BCE:** The first settlers, believed to be of Micronesian and Polynesian descent, arrive in the Gilbert Islands, now part of Kiribati. They establish villages and engage in subsistence farming, fishing, and navigational exploration of the Pacific Ocean.
- **16th-17th century:** European explorers, including Spanish and British navigators, begin to visit the Gilbert Islands, introducing Western influence and trade to the region.
- **1820s-1830s:** Whaling ships frequent the Gilbert Islands, establishing contact with the local inhabitants and leading to increased trade and cultural exchange.
- **1857:** The British Empire establishes a protectorate over the Gilbert Islands, aiming to control trade routes and protect British interests in the Pacific region.
- **1892:** The Gilbert Islands become a British crown colony, administered as part of the British Western Pacific Territories.
- **1941-1945:** During World War II, the Gilbert Islands are occupied by Japanese forces, leading to significant destruction and loss of life. The islands later become a crucial battleground in the Pacific theatre of the war, culminating in the Battle of Tarawa in 1943.
- **1979:** Kiribati gains independence from British colonial rule on July 12, 1979, and becomes a sovereign nation. Sir Ieremia Tabai becomes the country's first President.
- **1983:** The former Line Islands, including Kiritimati (Christmas Island), are incorporated into Kiribati, expanding the country's territory.
- **2000:** Kiribati faces challenges of political instability, including a failed coup attempt in the capital, Tarawa.
- **2008:** Anote Tong becomes President of Kiribati and advocates for global action on climate change, as Kiribati faces threats from rising sea levels and coastal erosion.
- **2014:** Kiribati purchases land in Fiji as a potential refuge for its population in the face of climate change-induced displacement.

ECONOMY

Kiribati's economy is primarily based on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and international aid. The country faces significant economic challenges due to its small land area, remote location, and vulnerability to climate change impacts, including rising sea levels and natural disasters.

Subsistence agriculture is a crucial economic activity in Kiribati, with coconut and breadfruit being staple crops for local consumption. However, limited arable land and freshwater resources constrain agricultural productivity, making the country heavily reliant on food imports.

Fishing is another important sector of Kiribati's economy, particularly tuna fishing, which provides revenue through licensing fees for foreign fishing vessels operating in Kiribati's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The government has implemented policies to promote sustainable fisheries management and maximize the benefits of its marine resources.

International aid, particularly from donor countries and organizations, plays a significant role in supporting Kiribati's development efforts, including infrastructure projects, healthcare, and education. Additionally, remittances from Kiribati citizens living abroad contribute to household incomes and support local economies.

Despite these economic activities, Kiribati faces ongoing challenges of limited economic diversification, inadequate infrastructure, high unemployment rates, and a small private sector. The government is exploring strategies to promote sustainable development, including investments in renewable energy, tourism, and climate change adaptation measures to build resilience and stimulate economic growth.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Kiribati's culture is deeply rooted in its Micronesian heritage, characterized by a rich tapestry of traditions, customs, and values that have been passed down through generations. At the heart of Kiribati culture is a strong sense of community, hospitality, and reverence for the land and sea.

Traditional Kiribati society is organized around extended family units, known as kainga, which form the foundation of social and economic life. Respect for elders and communal decision-making are integral to Kiribati culture, with community gatherings and ceremonies playing a central role in maintaining social cohesion and harmony.

Music and dance are important expressions of Kiribati culture, with traditional performances showcasing intricate movements, rhythmic drumming, and vibrant costumes. The te kateo, a traditional dance performed by men, and the tamure, a dance performed by women, are popular forms of entertainment during celebrations and festivals.

The art of storytelling is also highly valued in Kiribati culture, with oral traditions passed down through generations to preserve history, legends, and ancestral knowledge. Traditional crafts such as weaving, carving, and tattooing are practiced by artisans to create objects of cultural significance and beauty.

Despite modern influences, Kiribati remains committed to preserving its cultural heritage, with efforts to promote traditional practices, language, and customs. Through its vibrant culture, Kiribati celebrates its unique identity and connection to the land and sea, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among its people.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Disrespecting elders:** Show deference and respect to elders, as they hold significant authority and wisdom in Kiribati society. Avoid speaking or acting in a disrespectful manner towards older individuals.
- **Disrespecting religious sites:** Kiribati is predominantly Christian, and religious sites are considered sacred. Show respect when visiting churches or participating in religious ceremonies by dressing modestly and observing any customs or rituals.
- **Disrespecting local customs:** Familiarize yourself with Kiribati customs and traditions, such as gift-giving ceremonies or local greetings, and follow them respectfully. Avoid behaviours that may be considered disrespectful or offensive to the local community.
- **Touching someone's head:** In Kiribati culture, the head is considered sacred, and touching someone's head, especially without permission, is seen as disrespectful. Avoid this gesture to prevent causing offense.
- **Disrespecting the environment:** Kiribati's natural environment, including its coral reefs and pristine beaches, is highly valued by the local community. Avoid littering, damaging coral reefs, or disrespecting natural areas to show respect for the environment and local customs.

- **Inappropriate clothing:** Dress modestly, especially when visiting villages or participating in cultural events. Avoid wearing revealing clothing that may be considered inappropriate or offensive in Kiribati culture.
- **Public displays of affection:** Public displays of affection, such as kissing or hugging, are not common in Kiribati culture. Show restraint and respect for local customs by refraining from overt displays of affection in public settings.
- **Disrespecting traditional ceremonies:** Kiribati culture is rich in traditional ceremonies and rituals, such as dance performances and storytelling sessions. Show respect by observing quietly and refraining from disruptive behaviour during these cultural events.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Kiribati presents health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Mosquito-borne diseases:** Kiribati is endemic to mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, Zika virus, and chikungunya. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants, and staying in accommodations with screens or air conditioning.
- **Waterborne diseases:** Tap water in Kiribati may not be safe for consumption. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming ice cubes or uncooked foods washed in tap water. Additionally, practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, can help prevent waterborne illnesses like gastroenteritis.
- **Sun exposure:** Kiribati's tropical climate means high levels of sun exposure, increasing the risk of sunburn and heat-related illnesses. Travelers should use sunscreen with a high SPF, wear protective clothing, and stay hydrated to avoid sunburn and heatstroke.
- **Coral cuts and marine hazards:** While Kiribati's coral reefs are stunning, they can pose risks such as coral cuts and stings from marine creatures like jellyfish or sea urchins. Travelers should wear protective footwear while swimming or snorkelling and avoid contact with marine life.
- **Infectious diseases:** Travelers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting Kiribati. Additionally, hepatitis A and typhoid vaccinations are recommended. It's also essential to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and avoiding contact with sick individuals, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Rabies:** While rare, rabies does exist in Kiribati. Travelers should avoid contact with stray animals and seek medical attention immediately if bitten or scratched by an animal.
- **Medical facilities:** While medical facilities in Kiribati are limited, basic healthcare is available in urban areas. However, more advanced medical care may require evacuation to a larger medical centre in neighbouring countries. Travelers should ensure they have comprehensive travel insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of serious illness or injury.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Kiribati presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Natural hazards:** Kiribati is vulnerable to natural disasters such as cyclones, flooding, and coastal erosion due to its low-lying islands. Travelers should monitor weather forecasts and follow advice from local authorities to stay safe during extreme weather events.
- **Ocean hazards:** While Kiribati's waters are stunning, they can pose risks such as strong currents, rip tides, and sharp coral. Travelers should exercise caution when swimming, snorkelling, or participating in water activities and adhere to safety warnings posted by lifeguards.

- **Petty crime:** While violent crime is rare, petty crime such as theft and pickpocketing can occur, especially in urban areas and tourist hotspots. Travelers should take precautions to safeguard their belongings and avoid displaying valuables in public.
- **Healthcare facilities:** Medical facilities in Kiribati are limited, particularly on remote outer islands. Travelers should ensure they have comprehensive travel insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of serious illness or injury.
- **Transportation safety:** Roads in Kiribati may be poorly maintained, and traffic accidents can occur due to factors such as narrow roads and reckless driving. Travelers should exercise caution when driving or cycling and adhere to local traffic laws.
- **Political stability:** Kiribati has a stable political environment, but travellers should remain aware of local developments and avoid participating in political activities or demonstrations.
- **Environmental hazards:** Kiribati's fragile ecosystem is at risk due to climate change impacts such as sea-level rise and coral bleaching. Travelers should be mindful of their environmental footprint and follow responsible tourism practices to minimize negative impacts on the environment.

COUNTRY BRIEF – PHILIPPINES

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 114 million

Capital City: Manila

Official Languages: Filipino, English

Dialling Code: +63

Currency: Philippine Peso (PHP)

Time Zone: UTC+8

Human Development Index: 113th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- **Archipelagic Paradise:** The Philippines is an archipelago consisting of 7,641 islands during high tide, and 7,107 islands during low tide, according to the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority. This makes it the second-largest archipelago in the world after Indonesia.

- **Chocolate Hills:** Located in Bohol, the Chocolate Hills are a geological formation consisting of at least 1,260 individual hills spread over an area of more than 50 square kilometres. During the dry season, the grass-covered hills turn brown, resembling chocolate kisses, hence the name.
- **Diverse Marine Life:** The Philippines is part of the Coral Triangle, an area known for its high marine biodiversity. It is home to various marine species, including more than 2,000 species of fish and 500 species of coral, making it a popular destination for diving and snorkelling enthusiasts.
- **Filipino Inventions:** Filipinos have made significant contributions to the world through their inventions. Some notable inventions include the yo-yo, the moon buggy wheel, and the incubator. Filipinos also invented karaoke, which has become a global phenomenon.
- **Longest Christmas Celebration:** The Philippines is known for celebrating the world's longest Christmas season, which begins as early as September and lasts until January. Festivities include colourful decorations, lively street parades, and traditional Christmas carols, making it a joyous and festive time for Filipinos nationwide.

HISTORY

- **Prehistory to 16th century:** The Philippines is inhabited by various indigenous peoples, including the Austronesian-speaking ancestors of modern Filipinos. These communities engage in trade, agriculture, and cultural practices, developing diverse societies across the archipelago.
- **1521:** Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan arrives in the Philippines and claims the islands for Spain. He is killed in the Battle of Mactan by native chieftain Lapu-Lapu.
- **1565:** Spanish colonization begins with the arrival of Miguel López de Legazpi, establishing the first permanent European settlement in Cebu. The Spanish colonial period leads to the introduction of Christianity, Spanish language, and feudal system to the Philippines.
- **1896-1898:** The Philippine Revolution against Spanish rule erupts, led by Filipino nationalist figures such as Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo. The revolution culminates in the declaration of Philippine independence on June 12, 1898.
- **1898-1946:** The Philippines briefly gains independence from Spain but is ceded to the United States as part of the Treaty of Paris following the Spanish-American War. Under American rule, the Philippines undergoes significant social, economic, and political changes, leading to the establishment of a Commonwealth government in 1935.
- **1941-1945:** The Philippines is occupied by Japan during World War II, leading to widespread devastation and loss of life. The country becomes a battleground between Japanese and Allied forces, culminating in the Battle of Manila in 1945.
- **1946:** The Philippines becomes an independent republic on July 4, 1946, with Manuel Roxas as its first President. The United States grants full sovereignty to the Philippines, ending over 300 years of colonial rule.
- **1965-1986:** The Philippines experiences the authoritarian rule of Ferdinand Marcos, marked by corruption, human rights abuses, and martial law. The regime is overthrown in the People Power Revolution of 1986, leading to the restoration of democracy and the presidency of Corazon Aquino.
- **1990s:** The Philippines undergoes periods of political instability, economic growth, and social change. Challenges such as poverty, corruption, and insurgencies persist, while the country remains a vibrant democracy with a rich cultural heritage and diverse society.
- **2013:** Typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest tropical cyclones ever recorded, devastates the Philippines, particularly the Visayas region. The typhoon causes widespread destruction, claiming thousands of lives and displacing millions of people.
- **2016-2022:** Rodrigo Duterte assumes office as the 16th President of the Philippines on June 30, 2016. His presidency is characterized by controversial policies and a hardline approach to crime and drugs, including the implementation of the "war on drugs" campaign.
- **2022-present:** Ferdinand Marcos Jr assumes office as the 17th President of the Philippines.

ECONOMY

The economy of the Philippines is characterised by a diverse range of industries, with services, manufacturing, and agriculture playing significant roles in driving growth and development.

The services sector is the largest contributor to the Philippine economy, accounting for a substantial portion of GDP and employment. Key subsectors include business process outsourcing (BPO), tourism, retail, and finance. The BPO industry, in particular, has experienced rapid expansion, attracting foreign investment and creating jobs in areas such as call centres, IT services, and back-office operations.

Manufacturing also plays a vital role in the Philippines' economic landscape, with sectors such as electronics, automotive, and food processing contributing to industrial output and exports. The country's strategic location and skilled workforce have made it an attractive destination for multinational corporations seeking to establish manufacturing operations in Asia.

Agriculture remains an important sector in the Philippines, providing livelihoods for millions of Filipinos and contributing to food security. Key agricultural products include rice, coconut, sugarcane, and fruits. However, the agricultural sector faces challenges such as land reform issues, limited access to credit and technology, and vulnerability to natural disasters.

Overall, the Philippines' economy has experienced steady growth in recent years, driven by domestic consumption, infrastructure development, and strong macroeconomic fundamentals. However, the country also faces challenges such as income inequality, poverty, and infrastructure deficiencies, which require targeted policy interventions to sustain inclusive and resilient economic growth.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

The culture of the Philippines is a vibrant and diverse tapestry woven from a rich blend of indigenous, Malay, Spanish, Chinese, American, and Islamic influences. It reflects the country's complex history and diverse ethnic groups, each contributing unique customs, traditions, and values to the cultural mosaic.

Family is at the heart of Filipino culture, with strong ties and close-knit relationships forming the foundation of society. Respect for elders, known as "paggalang," is deeply ingrained in Filipino values, along with the concept of "utang na loob," or indebtedness, which emphasizes reciprocity and community support.

Religion also plays a significant role in Filipino culture, with Catholicism being the dominant faith brought by Spanish colonizers in the 16th century. Festivals and religious celebrations, such as Christmas, Holy Week, and fiestas honouring patron saints, are important occasions for Filipinos to gather, worship, and celebrate together.

Filipino cuisine is a fusion of flavours and influences from various cultures, characterized by dishes such as adobo, sinigang, and lechon. Food is often shared communally, reflecting the spirit of hospitality and generosity that pervades Filipino culture.

Music and dance are integral parts of Filipino culture, with traditional forms such as tinikling and singkil showcasing intricate movements and colourful costumes. Modern Filipino music genres like OPM (Original Pilipino Music) blend Western and indigenous influences, reflecting contemporary Filipino identity and expression.

Despite modernisation and globalisation, Filipinos take pride in preserving their cultural heritage and traditions, passing them down through generations to maintain a strong sense of identity and belonging in an ever-changing world.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Disrespecting elders:** Show respect to older individuals, addressing them with terms like "po" and "opo," and avoid speaking or acting in a disrespectful manner towards them.
- **Disregarding religious customs:** The Philippines is predominantly Catholic, so it's essential to respect religious sites, practices, and traditions. Dress modestly when visiting churches and avoid disrupting religious ceremonies.
- **Pointing with fingers:** Pointing with fingers is considered impolite in Filipino culture. Instead, use an open hand or gesture with your chin to indicate direction or objects.
- **Disrespecting local customs:** Familiarize yourself with Filipino customs and traditions, such as removing your shoes before entering someone's home, and follow them respectfully.
- **Public displays of affection:** While not strictly taboo, public displays of affection, such as kissing and hugging, are generally reserved for private settings in Filipino culture. Show restraint to avoid causing discomfort or offense.
- **Eating with your left hand:** In Filipino culture, the left hand is traditionally considered unclean. Avoid eating, offering, or accepting food with your left hand to show respect for cultural norms.
- **Talking loudly in public places:** Filipinos value modesty and restraint in public behaviour. Avoid speaking loudly or causing a disturbance in public places to show respect for others.
- **Disrespecting the environment:** Filipinos have a strong connection to nature and the environment. Avoid littering, damaging natural sites, or disrespecting local wildlife to demonstrate respect for the environment and local customs.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Philippines presents health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Mosquito-borne diseases:** The Philippines is endemic to mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, malaria, Zika virus, and chikungunya. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants, and staying in accommodations with screens or air conditioning.
- **Waterborne diseases:** Tap water in the Philippines may not be safe for consumption. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming ice cubes or uncooked foods washed in tap water. Additionally, practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, can help prevent waterborne illnesses like gastroenteritis.
- **Sun exposure:** The Philippines has a tropical climate with high levels of sun exposure, increasing the risk of sunburn and heat-related illnesses. Travelers should use sunscreen with a high SPF, wear protective clothing, and stay hydrated to avoid sunburn and heatstroke.
- **Foodborne illnesses:** Contaminated food and water can cause foodborne illnesses such as traveler's diarrhea. Travelers should exercise caution when eating street food and ensure that food is thoroughly cooked and served hot.
- **Infectious diseases:** Travelers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting the Philippines. Additionally, vaccinations for hepatitis A and typhoid are recommended. It's also essential to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and avoiding contact with sick individuals, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Rabies:** While rare, rabies does exist in the Philippines. Travelers should avoid contact with stray animals and seek medical attention immediately if bitten or scratched by an animal.
- **Medical facilities:** While medical facilities in urban areas of the Philippines are adequate for routine care, they may be limited in rural or remote areas. Travelers should ensure they

have comprehensive travel insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of serious illness or injury.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Philippines presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Crime:** The Philippines has varying levels of crime, including petty theft, robbery, and scams, particularly in urban areas and tourist hotspots. Travelers should be vigilant, avoid displaying valuables in public, and use caution when exploring unfamiliar areas, especially at night.
- **Terrorism:** While terrorist attacks in the Philippines are rare, certain regions, particularly in the southern part of the country, are affected by insurgency and terrorist activity. Travelers should exercise caution and stay informed about security developments, particularly in areas such as Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.
- **Natural disasters:** The Philippines is prone to natural disasters such as typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and landslides. Travelers should monitor weather forecasts, follow advice from local authorities, and have a contingency plan in place in case of emergencies.
- **Transportation safety:** Road accidents are common in the Philippines due to factors such as poor road conditions, reckless driving, and inadequate enforcement of traffic laws. Travelers should exercise caution when using public transportation or driving, wear seatbelts, and avoid traveling at night if possible.
- **Political instability:** While the Philippines has a stable political environment, occasional protests, demonstrations, and civil unrest may occur. Travelers should avoid participating in political activities or gatherings and stay informed about local developments.
- **Health risks:** As mentioned earlier, travelers should be aware of health risks such as mosquito-borne diseases, waterborne illnesses, and infectious diseases. Taking appropriate precautions, such as vaccinations and preventive measures, can help mitigate these risks.

COUNTRY BRIEF – CAMBODIA

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 17 million

Capital City: Phnom Penh

Official Languages: Khmer

Dialling Code: +855

Currency: Cambodian Riel (KHR)

Time Zone: UTC+7

Human Development Index: 146th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- **Angkor Wat:** Angkor Wat is the largest religious monument in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built in the early 12th century, this architectural marvel was originally constructed as a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Vishnu but later transformed into a Buddhist temple.
- **Floating Villages:** Cambodia is home to several floating villages, particularly around the Tonle Sap Lake. These communities live in houses built on stilts or floating platforms, relying on fishing and aquatic agriculture for their livelihoods. Visiting these villages offers a unique glimpse into traditional Cambodian life.

- **Khmer Cuisine:** Cambodian cuisine is known for its bold flavours, fresh ingredients, and unique culinary traditions. Some popular Cambodian dishes include fish amok (a coconut milk curry), kuy teav (noodle soup), and bai sach chrouk (grilled pork with rice).
- **Cultural Dance:** Traditional Khmer dance is a significant aspect of Cambodian culture, often performed at ceremonies, festivals, and celebrations. The classical dance style, known as Apsara dance, features intricate hand gestures, elaborate costumes, and graceful movements inspired by ancient Khmer art and mythology.
- **Kampot Pepper:** Kampot pepper is renowned worldwide for its exceptional quality and flavor. Grown in the Kampot region of southern Cambodia, this pepper variety is prized by chefs for its complex aroma and spicy kick. Kampot pepper has earned Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status, recognizing its unique terroir and production methods.

HISTORY

- **1st millennium BCE:** Kingdoms and city-states emerge in the region of present-day Cambodia, including the powerful kingdom of Funan, which serves as a centre of trade and Indian cultural influence.
- **9th-15th centuries CE:** The Khmer Empire rises to prominence, with its capital at Angkor. Under rulers such as Jayavarman II and Jayavarman VII, Angkor becomes a centre of religious devotion and architectural innovation, culminating in the construction of iconic temples like Angkor Wat and Bayon.
- **15th-19th centuries:** The decline of the Khmer Empire leads to periods of fragmentation and vulnerability to neighbouring powers, including the Thai and Vietnamese kingdoms. Cambodia becomes a vassal state, paying tribute to stronger neighbours while maintaining its cultural identity.
- **19th century:** Cambodia comes under French colonial rule as part of French Indochina. The French establish control over Cambodia, introducing administrative reforms, modern infrastructure, and educational systems while exploiting its resources for economic gain.
- **20th century:** Cambodia gains independence from France in 1953 under King Norodom Sihanouk. However, political instability and internal conflicts plague the country, leading to the rise of the Khmer Rouge, a communist revolutionary group led by Pol Pot.
- **1975-1979:** The Khmer Rouge regime comes to power and imposes radical social and agricultural reforms, leading to widespread atrocities, including genocide. An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians die from starvation, forced labour, and execution during the Khmer Rouge's brutal rule.
- **1980s:** Vietnam invades Cambodia, overthrowing the Khmer Rouge regime and installing a pro-Vietnamese government. Cambodia enters a period of civil war and international isolation, with the Khmer Rouge continuing to fight as part of a coalition government.
- **1990s-present:** Cambodia transitions to democracy, with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991 and the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The country undergoes economic development and political reforms, but challenges such as corruption, human rights abuses, and social inequality persist. Today, Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system, striving to rebuild and reconcile its troubled past while pursuing economic growth and development.

ECONOMY

Cambodia's economy has experienced significant growth and transformation in recent decades, driven by a combination of factors such as political stability, economic reforms, and foreign investment. The country's economy is primarily based on agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and services.

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Cambodia's economy, employing a large portion of the population and contributing to food security and rural livelihoods. Key agricultural products include rice, rubber, cassava, and palm oil, with rice being the primary staple crop.

Manufacturing has emerged as a key driver of economic growth, particularly in industries such as garments and textiles, footwear, and electronics. Cambodia's favourable labour conditions and preferential trade agreements, such as the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme with the European Union, have attracted foreign investment and enabled the expansion of export-oriented industries.

Tourism is another significant contributor to Cambodia's economy, with attractions such as Angkor Wat, vibrant cultural festivals, and pristine beaches attracting millions of visitors each year. The tourism sector generates revenue, creates employment opportunities, and supports small businesses across the country.

Services, including banking, telecommunications, and retail, also play a crucial role in Cambodia's economy, contributing to GDP growth and urban development. Despite these positive developments, challenges such as income inequality, limited infrastructure, and vulnerability to external shocks persist, requiring continued efforts to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Cambodia's culture is rich and diverse, shaped by a blend of indigenous traditions, Hindu-Buddhist influences, colonial legacies, and contemporary dynamics. At the heart of Cambodian culture is Theravada Buddhism, which permeates all aspects of society, including art, architecture, rituals, and daily life.

The ancient Khmer civilization, with its magnificent temples and sculptures, remains a defining feature of Cambodian culture. The majestic Angkor Wat complex, Bayon, and other Khmer temples are symbols of Cambodia's cultural heritage and spiritual legacy, attracting visitors from around the world.

Traditional Khmer dance and music are integral to Cambodian culture, with classical dance forms like Apsara and folk dances like Robam Moni Mekhala showcasing graceful movements, elaborate costumes, and storytelling themes drawn from Hindu mythology and Khmer folklore.

Cambodian cuisine is characterized by its bold flavours, aromatic spices, and fresh ingredients. Staple dishes include fish amok (a coconut milk curry), beef lok lak (stir-fried beef), and nom banh chok (rice noodle soup), often served with a variety of condiments and sauces.

Family and community are central to Cambodian culture, with strong bonds and collective values fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. Respect for elders, hospitality, and generosity are highly valued virtues, shaping social interactions and interpersonal relationships.

Despite periods of turmoil and hardship, Cambodia's resilient culture continues to thrive, evolving and adapting to changing times while preserving its timeless traditions and identity. Through its vibrant arts, rich heritage, and resilient spirit, Cambodian culture embodies the resilience, creativity, and resilience of its people.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Disrespecting Buddhist customs:** Cambodia is predominantly Buddhist, so it's essential to show respect for Buddhist customs and traditions. Remove your shoes before entering temples or someone's home, avoid pointing your feet at Buddha statues or monks, and dress modestly when visiting religious sites.
- **Disrespecting elders:** Cambodian culture places great importance on respecting elders. Use polite language and gestures when interacting with older individuals and avoid speaking or acting disrespectfully towards them.

- **Disrespecting the monarchy:** The Cambodian monarchy is highly revered, and any criticism or disrespect towards the royal family is considered offensive. Avoid discussing sensitive political topics or making derogatory remarks about the monarchy.
- **Public displays of affection:** Public displays of affection, such as kissing or hugging, are not common in Cambodian culture. Show restraint and avoid overt displays of affection in public places to respect local customs.
- **Disregarding local customs:** Familiarize yourself with Cambodian customs and traditions, such as greeting with a slight bow and clasped hands (known as the sampeah), and follow them respectfully. Avoid behaviours that may be considered disrespectful or offensive to the local community.
- **Disrespecting sacred sites:** Cambodia is home to many sacred sites and religious monuments, such as Angkor Wat and other temples. Treat these sites with reverence and avoid behaviour that may be disrespectful, such as climbing on ruins or taking inappropriate photos.
- **Disrespecting local beliefs:** Cambodian culture incorporates animist beliefs and superstitions alongside Buddhism. Show respect for local beliefs and practices, even if they differ from your own, and avoid mocking or belittling them.
- **Littering or disrespecting the environment:** Cambodians have a deep respect for nature and the environment. Avoid littering, damaging natural sites, or disrespecting wildlife to show respect for the environment and local customs.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Cambodia presents health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Mosquito-borne diseases:** Cambodia is endemic to mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, malaria, Zika virus, and chikungunya. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants, and staying in accommodations with screens or air conditioning.
- **Waterborne diseases:** Tap water in Cambodia may not be safe for consumption. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming ice cubes or uncooked foods washed in tap water. Additionally, practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, can help prevent waterborne illnesses like gastroenteritis.
- **Sun exposure:** Cambodia has a tropical climate with high levels of sun exposure, increasing the risk of sunburn and heat-related illnesses. Travelers should use sunscreen with a high SPF, wear protective clothing, and stay hydrated to avoid sunburn and heatstroke.
- **Foodborne illnesses:** Contaminated food and water can cause foodborne illnesses such as traveller's diarrhea. Travelers should exercise caution when eating street food and ensure that food is thoroughly cooked and served hot.
- **Infectious diseases:** Travelers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting Cambodia. Additionally, vaccinations for hepatitis A, typhoid, and Japanese encephalitis are recommended. It's also essential to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and avoiding contact with sick individuals, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Rabies:** While rare, rabies does exist in Cambodia. Travelers should avoid contact with stray animals and seek medical attention immediately if bitten or scratched by an animal.
- **Medical facilities:** While medical facilities in urban areas of Cambodia are adequate for routine care, they may be limited in rural or remote areas. Travelers should ensure they have comprehensive travel insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of serious illness or injury.
- **Japanese Encephalitis:** Cambodia is considered a high-risk area for Japanese encephalitis, a viral infection transmitted through mosquito bites. Travelers planning to

spend an extended period in rural areas or outdoor activities may consider getting vaccinated against Japanese encephalitis.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Cambodia presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Street crime:** Petty theft, bag snatching, and pickpocketing are common in tourist areas, markets, and crowded streets, particularly in cities like Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Travelers should be vigilant, especially in crowded areas, and avoid carrying valuables or displaying expensive items such as smartphones or cameras.
- **Motorcycle accidents:** Motorcycles are a popular mode of transportation in Cambodia, but road safety standards are often lower than in Western countries. Traffic accidents, particularly involving motorcycles, are common due to factors such as reckless driving, lack of traffic enforcement, and poorly maintained roads. Travelers should exercise caution when walking or cycling on roads and consider renting motorcycles only if experienced and confident in local traffic conditions.
- **Landmines:** Cambodia has a legacy of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) dating back to decades of conflict. While major tourist sites and urban areas are generally safe, travellers should stay on marked paths and avoid venturing into remote or rural areas without a knowledgeable guide.
- **Political demonstrations:** Political demonstrations and protests occasionally occur in Cambodia, particularly in the capital, Phnom Penh. While most protests are peaceful, they can escalate rapidly, leading to violence or clashes with security forces. Travelers should avoid participating in demonstrations or political gatherings and stay informed about local developments through reputable news sources.
- **Natural disasters:** Cambodia is prone to natural disasters such as flooding, tropical storms, and droughts. Travelers should monitor weather forecasts and follow advice from local authorities in the event of severe weather conditions. During the rainy season (May to November), flooding can disrupt travel and infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.
- **Scams and fraud:** Tourists may encounter scams and fraudulent activities, such as overcharging for goods or services, fake tour operators, or misleading information about attractions. Travelers should be cautious when dealing with unfamiliar vendors, verify prices before making purchases, and use reputable tour operators recommended by trusted sources.

COUNTRY BRIEF – THAILAND

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 66.7 million

Capital City: Bangkok

Official Languages: Thai

Dialling Code: +66

Currency: Thai baht (THB)

Time Zone: UTC+7

Human Development Index: 66th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- **Land of Smiles:** Thailand is often referred to as the "Land of Smiles" due to the friendly and welcoming nature of its people. Thai culture places a strong emphasis on hospitality and politeness, making visitors feel warmly welcomed wherever they go.
- **Thai Cuisine:** Thai cuisine is renowned worldwide for its bold flavours, aromatic spices, and diverse ingredients. From spicy curries and fragrant stir-fries to savory street food and sweet desserts, Thai cuisine offers a tantalizing array of dishes to delight the taste buds.
- **Elephant Conservation:** Thailand is home to the largest population of domesticated elephants in the world. Elephants hold a special place in Thai culture and history, and efforts are underway to promote elephant conservation and ethical tourism practices.
- **Floating Markets:** Thailand is famous for its floating markets, where vendors sell fresh produce, souvenirs, and local delicacies from boats along scenic canals and rivers. Floating markets such as Damnoen Saduak and Amphawa offer a unique shopping experience and a glimpse into traditional Thai life.
- **Songkran Festival:** Songkran is Thailand's most celebrated festival, marking the traditional Thai New Year. Observed in April, Songkran is known for its lively water fights and colourful street celebrations, where locals and tourists alike participate in splashing water to wash away the past year's misfortunes and welcome the new year with joy and optimism.

HISTORY

- **Prehistoric Period:** Thailand's history dates back to prehistoric times, with evidence of human habitation dating back over 10,000 years. Various ancient civilisations, including the Dvaravati, Mon, and Khmer, inhabited the region, leaving behind archaeological sites and cultural artifacts.
- **Sukhothai Kingdom (1238-1438):** The Sukhothai Kingdom, founded by King Si Inthathit, is considered the first independent Thai kingdom. Known for its political stability, cultural achievements, and artistic innovations, the Sukhothai period is regarded as a golden age in Thai history.
- **Ayutthaya Kingdom (1351-1767):** The Ayutthaya Kingdom, established by King Ramathibodi I, becomes a powerful regional empire, expanding its influence over much of mainland Southeast Asia. Ayutthaya thrives as a centre of trade, culture, and religion, but it eventually falls to Burmese invaders in 1767, leading to the destruction of the capital and the end of the kingdom.
- **Thonburi and Rattanakosin Periods (1767-1932):** Following the fall of Ayutthaya, General Taksin establishes the Thonburi Kingdom, which later gives way to the Rattanakosin Kingdom under King Rama I. The Rattanakosin period sees the founding of Bangkok as the new capital and the establishment of the Chakri Dynasty, which continues to rule Thailand to this day.
- **Modernisation and Reforms (late 19th-early 20th centuries):** Thailand modernizes and undergoes significant reforms under King Rama IV (King Mongkut) and King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn), who introduced Western-style institutions, infrastructure projects, and social reforms to modernize the country and prevent colonization by European powers.
- **World War II and Post-war Era:** Thailand remains neutral during World War II but is occupied by Japan from 1941 to 1945. After the war, Thailand emerges as a key ally of the United States during the Cold War, receiving economic and military assistance to counter communist movements in the region.
- **Contemporary Thailand:** Thailand experiences periods of political instability, including military coups and democratic transitions. The country's monarchy plays a central role in Thai society, although political power oscillates between elected governments and military regimes. Despite challenges, Thailand enjoys economic growth, cultural vibrancy, and a thriving tourism industry, making it a popular destination for travellers from around the world.

ECONOMY

Thailand's economy is one of the largest and most dynamic in Southeast Asia, characterized by a diverse range of industries, robust export-oriented sectors, and a strategic geographic location at the crossroads of mainland Southeast Asia. With a GDP of over \$500 billion (as of 2021), Thailand ranks among the top economies in the region.

The Thai economy is driven by several key sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, and services. Manufacturing plays a significant role in Thailand's economy, with industries such as automotive, electronics, textiles, and machinery contributing to export revenues and employment opportunities. Thailand is a major global exporter of automobiles, electronic components, and consumer goods, with multinational corporations investing in manufacturing facilities across the country.

Agriculture remains an essential sector of the Thai economy, employing a significant portion of the population and contributing to food security and rural livelihoods. Key agricultural products include rice, rubber, cassava, and fruits, with Thailand being one of the world's leading rice exporters.

Tourism is another vital pillar of Thailand's economy, attracting millions of visitors each year to its pristine beaches, cultural attractions, and vibrant cities. The tourism sector generates revenue, creates employment opportunities, and supports small businesses across the country.

Services, including banking, finance, logistics, and healthcare, also play a crucial role in Thailand's economy, contributing to GDP growth and urban development. The government has implemented policies to promote economic diversification, innovation, and infrastructure development to sustain long-term growth and competitiveness in the global market.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Thailand's culture is a rich tapestry woven from centuries of tradition, spirituality, and artistic expression, creating a vibrant and diverse cultural landscape that captivates visitors from around the world. Rooted in Theravada Buddhism, Thai culture is characterized by its deep reverence for religion, respect for hierarchy and tradition, and emphasis on harmony and hospitality.

One of the most visible aspects of Thai culture is its elaborate and colorful festivals, which are celebrated throughout the year with fervor and enthusiasm. Festivals such as Songkran (Thai New Year), Loy Krathong (Festival of Lights), and Phi Ta Khon (Ghost Festival) showcase the Thai people's joyous spirit, creativity, and devotion to tradition.

Traditional Thai arts and crafts, including dance, music, painting, and sculpture, are integral to Thai culture and reflect the country's rich heritage and religious beliefs. Thai classical dance forms such as Khon and Likay, intricate temple murals depicting scenes from Buddhist mythology, and exquisite handicrafts such as silk weaving and pottery exemplify the craftsmanship and artistry of the Thai people.

Food is another essential aspect of Thai culture, with Thai cuisine renowned worldwide for its bold flavors, aromatic spices, and diverse ingredients. From spicy curries and fragrant stir-fries to savory street food and sweet desserts, Thai cuisine is a reflection of the country's cultural diversity, regional specialties, and culinary creativity.

Hospitality is a cornerstone of Thai culture, with the Thai people known for their warm smiles, generosity, and welcoming nature. Whether enjoying a meal with friends, exploring ancient temples, or participating in local festivities, visitors to Thailand are sure to experience the warmth and hospitality that define Thai culture.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- **Disrespecting Buddhist customs:** Cambodia is predominantly Buddhist, so it's essential to show respect for Buddhist customs and traditions. Remove your shoes before entering temples or someone's home, avoid pointing your feet at Buddha statues or monks, and dress modestly when visiting religious sites.
- **Disrespecting the monarchy:** The Thai monarchy is highly revered, and any criticism or disrespect towards the royal family is considered offensive and may result in legal consequences. Avoid making derogatory remarks or engaging in discussions about sensitive political topics related to the monarchy.
- **Disrespecting Buddha images and religious sites:** Buddhism is central to Thai culture, and Buddha images and religious sites are considered sacred. Avoid touching or climbing on Buddha statues, pointing your feet at them, or behaving disrespectfully in temples or religious ceremonies.
- **Disrespecting elders:** Thai culture places great importance on respecting elders and authority figures. Use polite language and gestures when interacting with older individuals, and avoid speaking or acting disrespectfully towards them.
- **Public displays of affection:** Public displays of affection, such as kissing or hugging, are not common in Thai culture and may be considered inappropriate, especially in temples or other religious sites. Show restraint and avoid overt displays of affection in public places.
- **Disrespecting Thai customs and traditions:** Familiarise yourself with Thai customs and traditions, such as the wai (a traditional Thai greeting), and follow them respectfully. Avoid behaviours that may be considered disrespectful or offensive to the local community.
- **Disrespecting the national flag:** The Thai national flag is a symbol of pride and patriotism, and any disrespect towards it, such as stepping on or defacing the flag, is considered offensive and may result in legal consequences.
- **Disrespecting Thai culture and beliefs:** Thai culture incorporates animist beliefs and superstitions alongside Buddhism. Show respect for local beliefs and practices, even if they differ from your own, and avoid mocking or belittling them.
- **Littering or disrespecting the environment:** Thais have a deep respect for nature and the environment. Avoid littering, damaging natural sites, or disrespecting wildlife to show respect for the environment and local customs.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Thailand presents health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Mosquito-borne diseases:** Thailand is endemic to mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, malaria, Zika virus, and chikungunya. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants, and staying in accommodations with screens or air conditioning.
- **Waterborne diseases:** Tap water in Thailand may not be safe for consumption. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming ice cubes or uncooked foods washed in tap water. Additionally, practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, can help prevent waterborne illnesses like gastroenteritis.
- **Foodborne illnesses:** Contaminated food and water can cause foodborne illnesses such as traveller's diarrhea. Travelers should exercise caution when eating street food and ensure that food is thoroughly cooked and served hot.
- **Sun exposure:** Thailand has a tropical climate with high levels of sun exposure, increasing the risk of sunburn and heat-related illnesses. Travelers should use sunscreen with a high SPF, wear protective clothing, and stay hydrated to avoid sunburn and heatstroke.
- **Infectious diseases:** Travelers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting Thailand. Additionally, vaccinations for hepatitis A, typhoid, and Japanese encephalitis are recommended. It's also important to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and avoiding contact with sick individuals, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

- **Rabies:** While rare, rabies does exist in Thailand. Travelers should avoid contact with stray animals and seek medical attention immediately if bitten or scratched by an animal.
- **Traffic accidents:** Road accidents are common in Thailand due to factors such as reckless driving, inadequate infrastructure, and congested roads. Travelers should exercise caution when walking or cycling on roads and consider using reputable transportation services to minimize the risk of accidents.
- **Air pollution:** Air pollution levels can be high in urban areas of Thailand, particularly during the dry season. Travelers with respiratory conditions should take precautions, such as wearing masks and avoiding outdoor activities during periods of high pollution.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

Traveling to Thailand presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Petty crime:** Petty theft, bag snatching, and pickpocketing are common in tourist areas, markets, and crowded streets, particularly in cities like Bangkok and popular tourist destinations such as Phuket and Chiang Mai. Travelers should be vigilant, especially in crowded areas, and avoid carrying valuables or displaying expensive items such as smartphones or cameras.
- **Scams and fraud:** Tourists may encounter scams and fraudulent activities, such as overcharging for goods or services, fake tour operators, or misleading information about attractions. Travelers should be cautious when dealing with unfamiliar vendors, verify prices before making purchases, and use reputable tour operators recommended by trusted sources.
- **Political demonstrations:** Political demonstrations and protests occasionally occur in Thailand, particularly in the capital, Bangkok. While most protests are peaceful, they can escalate rapidly, leading to violence or clashes with security forces. Travelers should avoid participating in demonstrations or political gatherings and stay informed about local developments through reputable news sources.
- **Traffic accidents:** Road accidents are common in Thailand due to factors such as reckless driving, inadequate infrastructure, and congested roads. Travelers should exercise caution when walking or cycling on roads and consider using reputable transportation services to minimize the risk of accidents.
- **Natural disasters:** Thailand is prone to natural disasters such as flooding, tropical storms, and earthquakes. Travelers should monitor weather forecasts and follow advice from local authorities in the event of severe weather conditions. During the rainy season (May to November), flooding can disrupt travel and infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.
- **Drug-related offenses:** Thailand has strict laws regarding drug possession and trafficking, and penalties for drug-related offenses can be severe, including lengthy prison sentences or even the death penalty. Travelers should avoid any involvement with illegal drugs and refrain from accepting or transporting items on behalf of others.
- **Terrorism:** While the risk of terrorism in Thailand is generally low, there have been isolated incidents in the past, particularly in southern provinces near the border with Malaysia. Travelers should remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities to local authorities.
- **Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO):** Certain border areas and remote regions of Thailand may contain landmines and UXO leftover from past conflicts. Travelers should stay on marked paths and avoid venturing into remote or rural areas without a knowledgeable guide.

COUNTRY BRIEF – TIMOR-LESTE

BASIC INFORMATION

Population: 1.34 million

Capital City: Dili

Official Languages: Portuguese, Tetum

Dialling Code: +670

Currency: US Dollar (USD)

Time Zone: UTC+9

Human Development Index: 155th of 188 countries



QUICK FACTS

- **Youngest Country in Asia:** Timor-Leste, also known as East Timor, is the youngest country in Asia. It gained independence from Indonesia on May 20, 2002, making it one of the world's newest nations.
- **Coffee Paradise:** Timor-Leste is renowned for its high-quality coffee beans, particularly the Arabica variety. Coffee production is a significant contributor to the country's economy, with smallholder farmers cultivating coffee in the mountainous regions.
- **Diverse Languages:** Timor-Leste is a linguistically diverse nation, with more than 30 languages spoken across the country. Tetum and Portuguese are the official languages, while Bahasa Indonesia and English are also widely spoken.
- **Rich Cultural Heritage:** Timor-Leste has a rich and diverse cultural heritage, with influences from indigenous traditions, Portuguese colonization, and Indonesian occupation. Traditional dance, music, and crafts are integral to Timorese culture, reflecting the country's history and identity.

- **Stunning Natural Beauty:** Timor-Leste boasts breathtaking landscapes, including rugged mountains, pristine beaches, and lush rainforests. Popular tourist destinations include Atauro Island, Jaco Island, and the Maubisse mountain range, offering opportunities for hiking, diving, and wildlife viewing.

HISTORY

- **Pre-Colonial Period:** Timor-Leste's history dates back to ancient times, with evidence of human habitation dating back thousands of years. The island of Timor was inhabited by Austronesian and Papuan-speaking peoples, who lived in small, independent communities.
- **Colonisation by Portugal (16th Century):** Portuguese explorers arrived in Timor in the early 16th century and established a presence on the island. Timor became a Portuguese colony, known as Portuguese Timor, and remained under Portuguese rule for over 400 years.
- **Occupation by Japan (1942-1945):** During World War II, Timor-Leste was occupied by Japanese forces, who established control over the island from 1942 to 1945. The Japanese occupation had a significant impact on the local population and economy.
- **Indonesian Occupation (1975-1999):** Following Portugal's withdrawal from Timor-Leste in 1975, Indonesia invaded and annexed the territory, leading to a brutal and prolonged period of occupation. The Indonesian occupation was marked by widespread human rights abuses, violence, and resistance from the Timorese people.
- **Referendum and Independence (1999-2002):** In 1999, following decades of resistance and international pressure, Timor-Leste held a referendum on independence, in which the majority of voters chose independence from Indonesia. This led to a period of violence and instability, during which Indonesian-backed militias attacked civilians and destroyed infrastructure. Timor-Leste officially gained independence on May 20, 2002, becoming the first new sovereign state of the 21st century.
- **Post-Independence Challenges (2002-present):** Since gaining independence, Timor-Leste has faced numerous challenges, including political instability, economic development, and social reconstruction. The country has made significant progress in rebuilding its infrastructure, establishing democratic institutions, and fostering peace and reconciliation.

ECONOMY

Timor-Leste's economy is characterised by its reliance on oil and gas revenues, agriculture, and international aid. Despite its rich natural resources, the country faces significant economic challenges, including high levels of poverty, limited infrastructure, and a small domestic market.

Oil and gas production are the main drivers of Timor-Leste's economy, accounting for the majority of government revenue and exports. The Timor Sea, located between Timor-Leste and Australia, contains significant reserves of oil and natural gas, which have been developed through joint ventures with international energy companies.

Agriculture also plays a crucial role in Timor-Leste's economy, employing a large portion of the population and contributing to food security and rural livelihoods. Key agricultural products include coffee, rice, maize, and cocoa, which are primarily grown by smallholder farmers in rural areas.

Timor-Leste's economy is heavily dependent on international aid and assistance, particularly from donor countries and multilateral organizations. Foreign aid supports various development projects, including infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation programs. In recent years, the Timor-Leste government has sought to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil and gas revenues by promoting tourism, agribusiness, and other non-oil sectors. However, the country continues to face significant challenges in achieving sustainable economic growth and development amidst ongoing political instability and limited resources.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY & SENSITIVITY

Timor-Leste's cultural tapestry is a testament to its enduring spirit and diverse heritage, forged through centuries of tradition, resilience, and adaptation. Shaped by a complex history of colonization, conflict, and resistance, Timorese culture reflects the profound connections between its people, land, and traditions.

The linguistic landscape of Timor-Leste is remarkably diverse, with over 30 languages spoken across the country. Tetum and Portuguese serve as official languages, reflecting the nation's colonial past, while indigenous languages such as Mambae, Fataluku, and Bunak preserve ancient cultural traditions and knowledge.

At the heart of Timorese culture lies a deep reverence for the land and its bounty. Traditional farming practices sustain communities and preserve cultural heritage, with terrace farming and agroforestry techniques passed down through generations.

Music, dance, and oral storytelling are vibrant expressions of Timorese identity and resilience. From rhythmic drumming to intricate dance forms like *tais mane* and *tais fetu*, Timorese performances celebrate community, solidarity, and cultural pride.

Religion also plays a significant role in shaping Timor-Leste's cultural landscape, with Catholicism intertwined with indigenous animist beliefs and rituals. This syncretic blend of faiths reflects the complexity and richness of Timorese spirituality.

Despite the challenges of history and modernity, Timor-Leste's culture endures as a source of strength, identity, and unity for its people, fostering resilience, creativity, and a deep sense of belonging.

Avoid the following culturally sensitive behaviours:

- Disrespecting elders and authority figures: Timorese culture places great emphasis on respecting elders and authority figures. Use polite language and gestures when interacting with older individuals and community leaders.
- Disrespecting religious customs and beliefs: Timor-Leste is predominantly Catholic, and religion holds significant importance in daily life. Show respect for religious customs and practices, such as attending church services and participating in religious festivals.
- Dressing inappropriately: Dress modestly and conservatively, especially when visiting religious sites or rural communities. Avoid wearing revealing or provocative clothing that may be considered disrespectful or offensive.
- Public displays of affection: Timorese culture is conservative when it comes to public displays of affection. Refrain from kissing, hugging, or other intimate gestures in public, as they may be perceived as inappropriate.
- Touching someone's head: In Timorese culture, the head is considered the most sacred part of the body. Avoid touching someone's head, especially elders or children, as it may be considered disrespectful.
- Pointing with fingers or feet: Pointing with fingers or feet is considered impolite in Timor-Leste. Use an open hand or gesture with your whole hand to indicate directions or objects instead.
- Disrespecting cultural artifacts: Timor-Leste has a rich cultural heritage, including traditional artifacts and sacred objects. Show respect for cultural artifacts by not touching or handling them without permission, especially in museums or cultural centres.
- Disrespecting local customs and traditions: Familiarise yourself with Timorese customs and traditions and follow them respectfully. Avoid behaviours that may be considered disrespectful or offensive to the local community, such as loud or disruptive behaviour in public spaces.

HEALTH RISKS

Traveling to Timor-Leste presents health risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Mosquito-borne diseases:** Timor-Leste is endemic to mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, malaria, and chikungunya. Travelers should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing long sleeves and pants, and staying in accommodations with screens or air conditioning.
- **Waterborne diseases:** Tap water in Timor-Leste may not be safe for consumption. Travelers should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid consuming ice cubes or uncooked foods washed in tap water. Additionally, practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, can help prevent waterborne illnesses like gastroenteritis.
- **Foodborne illnesses:** Contaminated food and water can cause foodborne illnesses such as traveler's diarrhea. Travelers should exercise caution when eating street food and ensure that food is thoroughly cooked and served hot.
- **Infectious diseases:** Travelers should ensure routine vaccinations are up to date before visiting Timor-Leste. Additionally, vaccinations for hepatitis A, typhoid, and Japanese encephalitis may be recommended. It's also important to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and avoiding contact with sick individuals, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Rabies:** While rare, rabies does exist in Timor-Leste. Travelers should avoid contact with stray animals and seek medical attention immediately if bitten or scratched by an animal.
- **Limited healthcare infrastructure:** Timor-Leste has limited healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Travelers should carry a basic medical kit with essential medications and supplies and consider purchasing travel health insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of emergencies.

SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

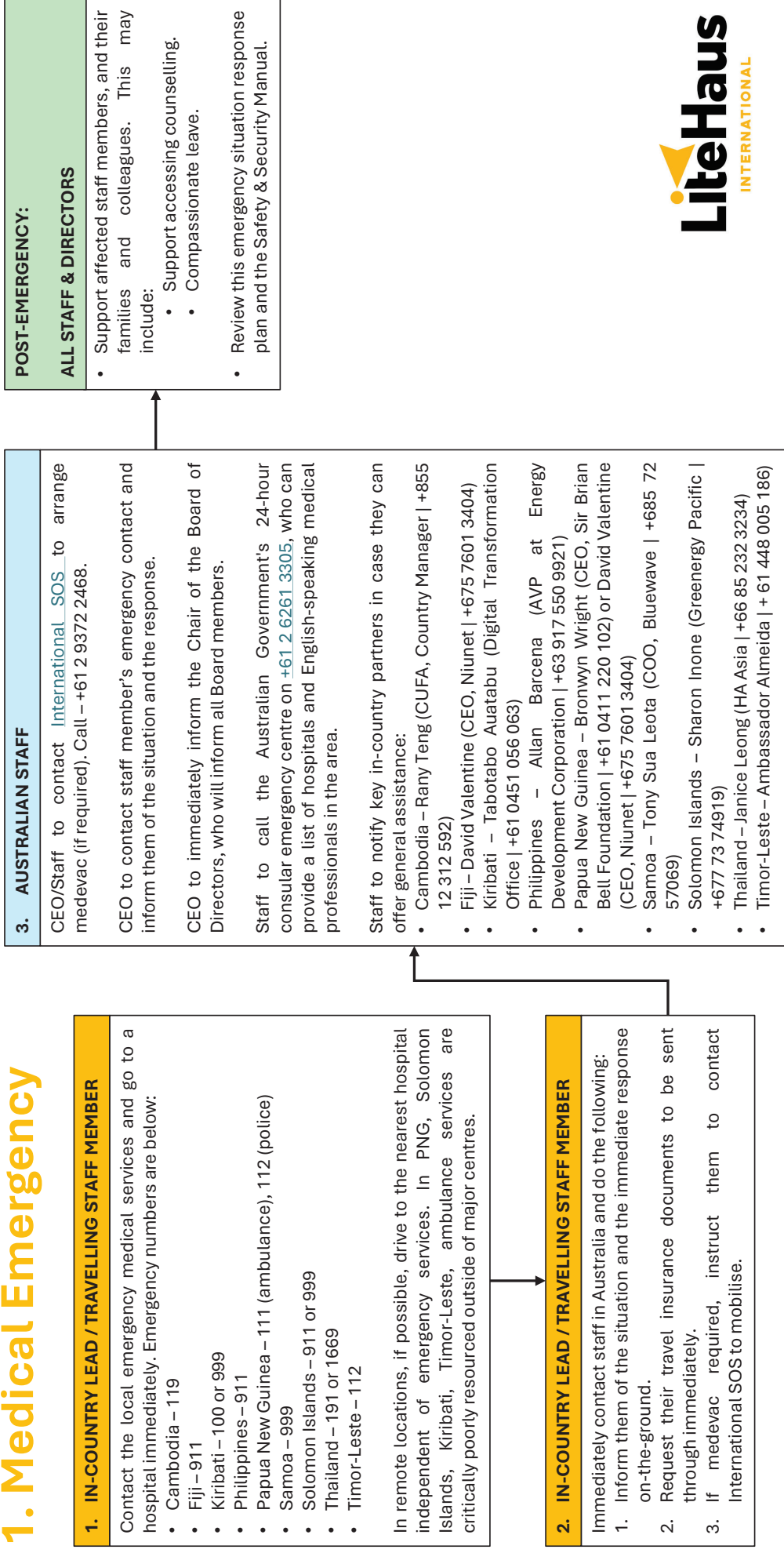
Traveling to Timor-Leste presents several safety and security risks that travellers should be aware of and take precautions against:

- **Political instability:** Timor-Leste has experienced periods of political instability and civil unrest since gaining independence in 2002. Political demonstrations and protests may occur, particularly in the capital, Dili. Travelers should avoid participating in demonstrations or political gatherings and monitor local news for updates on the situation.
- **Crime:** Petty crime, such as theft and pickpocketing, can occur, especially in crowded areas and tourist areas. Travelers should remain vigilant and take precautions to protect their belongings, such as keeping valuables secure and avoiding displaying expensive items in public.
- **Road safety:** Road conditions in Timor-Leste can be poor, with narrow roads, limited signage, and erratic driving behavior. Travelers should exercise caution when driving or traveling on roads, particularly in rural areas, and avoid driving at night whenever possible.
- **Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO):** Certain areas of Timor-Leste may contain landmines and UXO leftover from past conflicts. Travelers should stay on marked paths and avoid venturing into remote or rural areas without a knowledgeable guide.
- **Natural disasters:** Timor-Leste is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, landslides, and tropical storms. Travelers should be prepared for these events and follow advice from local authorities in the event of severe weather conditions.
- **Limited healthcare infrastructure:** Timor-Leste has limited healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Travelers should be aware of this and carry a basic medical kit with essential medications and supplies. It's also advisable to purchase travel health insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of emergencies.

- **Border tensions:** Timor-Leste shares borders with Indonesia and maritime boundaries with Australia. Travelers should be aware of any border tensions or disputes that may affect travel in the region and follow advice from local authorities and travel advisories.

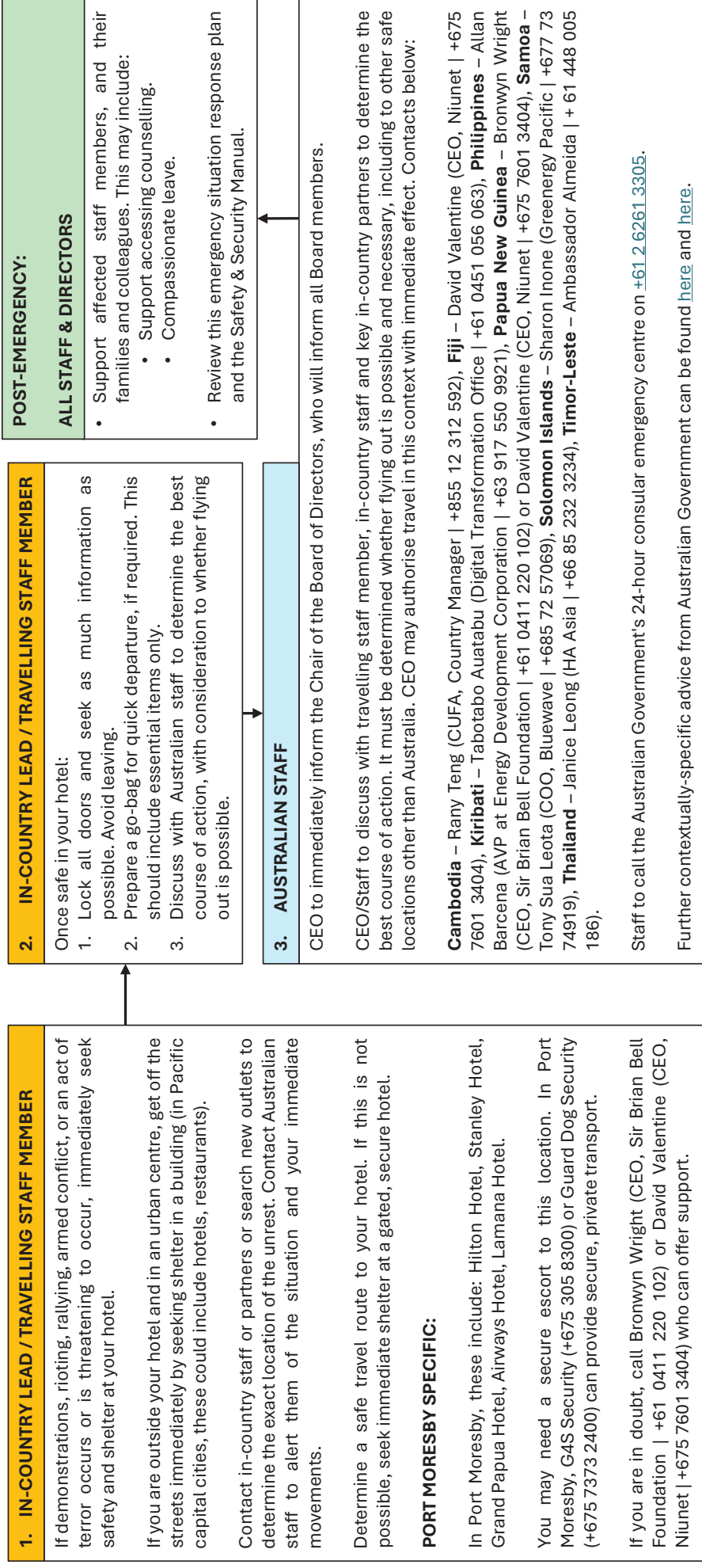
International Travel Emergency Situation Response –

1. Medical Emergency



International Travel Emergency Situation Response –

2. Civil Unrest/Act of Terror/Armed Conflict



International Travel Emergency Situation Response –

3a. Natural Disaster – Earthquake

<div>1. IN-COUNTRY LEAD / TRAVELLING STAFF MEMBER</div> <div>In the immediate aftermath of an earthquake:</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treat injuries. Check yourself for injuries. Seek first aid, if necessary, before helping other injured or trapped people. If it's serious, you may need medical assistance (refer to Situation Response 1).• Contact Australian staff immediately and inform them of the situation.• Conserve battery power. Keep your mobile charged as much as possible. Send text messages where possible, and turn off other services like syncing when not required. <div>If you're indoors:</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch for fire. Fire is the most common hazard after an earthquake. Especially if a gas pipe breaks. If it's small fire, try to put it out if it's safe to do so. If it's a large fire, evacuate immediately.• Be aware of damaged wires and broken glass.• Identify and avoid displaced items. Even if something hasn't fallen yet, sudden aftershocks may dislodge it. <div>If you're outside:</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep away from buildings. Especially multi-level and high rise structures. Even if it looks intact, the tremor could have weakened it. It could collapse during aftershocks.• Don't enter any building. Only enter once authorities have confirmed it's safe.• Stay clear of power lines. Especially if down or damaged.• Watch for falling rocks and trees.• Be aware of landslides and mudslides.	<div>2. ALL STAFF MEMBERS</div> <div>CEO/staff and travelling staff member must decide promptly whether it is safer to shelter in place (Option 1) or evacuate (Option 2).</div> <div>Option 1: Shelter in place</div> <div>Take appropriate shelter. It may be safer to shelter inside rather than evacuate a building, especially if the building is built to withstand earthquakes.</div> <div>Follow instructions from local authorities. If instructions aren't available, decisions should be made based on the information available to staff members from coverage.</div> <div>Watch out for infectious diseases. Without running water, sanitation is an issue. Waterborne infectious diseases such as cholera are common. Only drink purified water.</div> <div>Option 2: Evacuate</div> <div>The travelling staff member must determine that travelling to the airport is possible, practical and safe.</div> <div>CEO/staff and the travelling staff member must determine where the staff member should go – this may not be Australia, if another location is easier to get to.</div> <div>Staff book tickets quickly as options can book out quickly. The priority is to remove the staff member from the affected location at all costs.</div>	<div>3. AUSTRALIAN STAFF</div> <div>CEO to immediately inform the Chair of the Board of Directors, who will inform all Board members.</div> <div>CEO/Staff may discuss with travelling staff member, in-country staff and key in-country partners to determine the best course of action.</div> <div>Philippines – Allan Barcena (AVP at Energy Development Corporation +63 917 550 9921), Papua New Guinea – Bronwyn Wright (CEO, Sir Brian Bell Foundation +61 0411 220 102) or David Valentine (CEO, Niunet +675 7601 3404), Solomon Islands – Sharon Inone (Greenery Pacific +677 73 74919), Thailand – Janice Leong (HA Asia +66 85 232 3234), Timor-Leste – Ambassador Almeida +61 448 005 186).</div> <div>Staff to call the Australian Government's 24-hour consular emergency centre on +61 2 6261 3305.</div> <div>POST-EMERGENCY: ALL STAFF & DIRECTORS</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support affected staff members, and their families and colleagues. This may include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support accessing counselling.• Compassionate leave.• Review this emergency situation response plan and the Safety & Security Manual.
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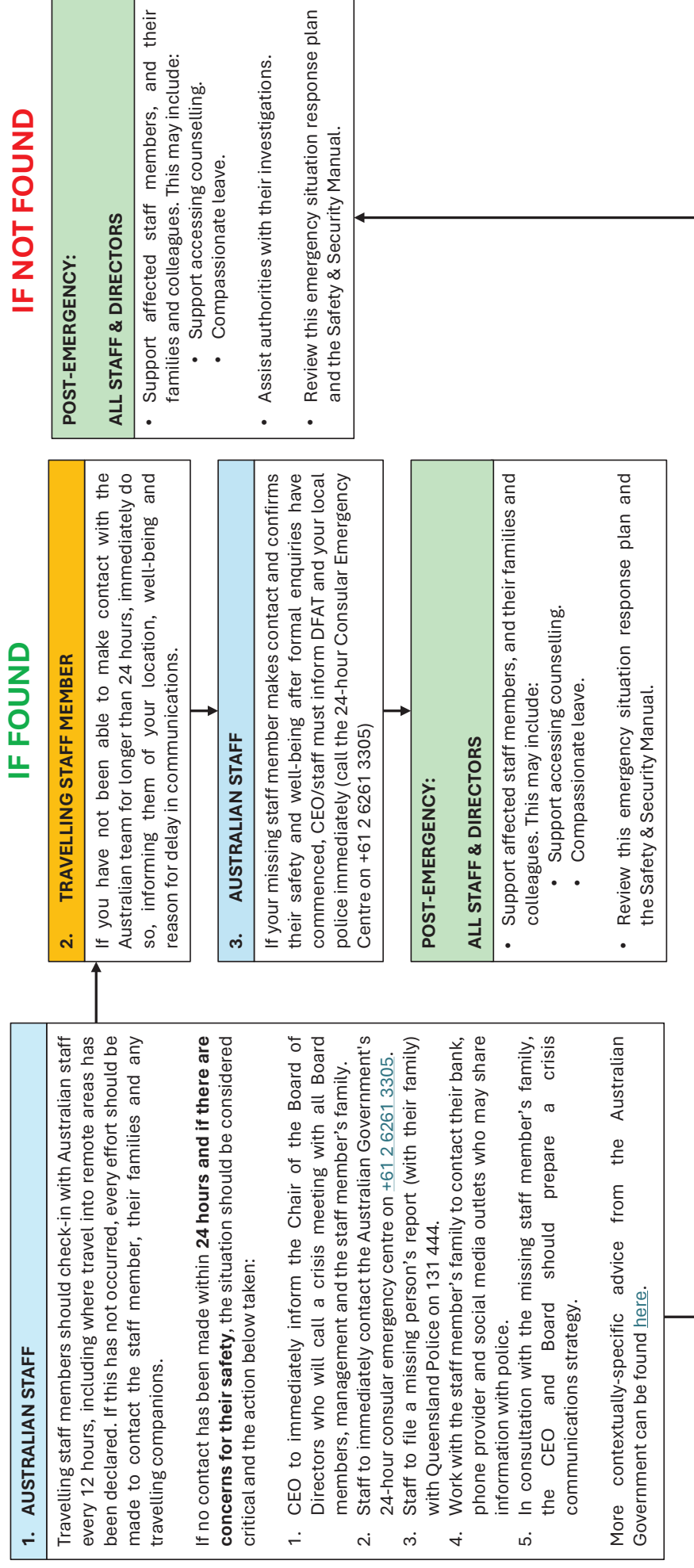
International Travel Emergency Situation Response – 3b. Natural Disaster – Cyclone/Flooding

<p>1. ALL STAFF MEMBERS</p> <p>When a travelling staff member or Australian staff member identifies a formal severe weather warning where travel is occurring, they must immediately notify the CEO.</p> <p>Staff must then gather as much information as possible to assess the prospective timeline and path of the weather system and its potential severity.</p>	
<p>2. ALL STAFF MEMBERS</p> <p>CEO/staff and travelling staff member must decide promptly whether it is safer to evacuate (Option 1) or shelter in place (Option 2). Key considerations are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official evacuations. If local authorities declare the traveller must leave, then leave. Staying despite an evacuation order puts the traveller's life at risk. It may be illegal to stay. Travel insurance may be voided. • Travelling by air. There may be difficulty getting flights before the severe weather incident hits. Strong winds may ground flights, and many airlines will cancel all incoming flights when severe weather approaches. • Travelling by land. Is it possible/practical to travel by road before the severe weather arrives? Highways may get blocked. Will the eventual destination be safe? • Shelter. If the traveller stays, is there adequate shelter? <p>The Australian Government's 24-hour consular emergency centre on +61 2 6261 3305 may be able to offer advice.</p>	

<p>3. TRAVELLING STAFF MEMBER</p> <p>If Option 2 (Shelter in Place) is opted for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to an emergency shelter. In most cases, a local emergency shelter is the safest place to be during a cyclone. Never venture out once a cyclone has already made landfall. • Get to a sturdier building. If the building you're in isn't built to withstand a cyclone and you can't make it to a shelter in time, find a sturdier structure. • Avoid bodies of water. In a cyclone, getting further away from the shore and on higher ground is usually safer. • Follow instructions. If possible, directions from your hotel manager, local partners and authorities. • Charge your devices. If the power is cut off, you won't be able to charge them. You need the to stay informed about the event and contact the team. • Get water bottles. The water may be shut off once the cyclone makes landfall. You will need clean drinking water. • Close and cover window. Extreme winds and flying debris often shatter glass. Consider barricading windows with a heavy piece of furniture. 	
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<p>4. AUSTRALIAN STAFF</p> <p>CEO to inform the Chair of the Board of Directors, who will inform the Board of the course of action.</p> <p>Staff to contact travel insurer to have on standby.</p> <p>CEO/Staff may discuss with key in-country partners to determine the best course of action.</p> <p>Cambodia – Rany Teng (CUFA +855 12 312 592), Fiji – David Valentine (CEO +675 7601 3404), Kiribati – Tabotabo Auatabu (Ministry ICT +61 0451 056 063), Philippines – Allan Barcena (EDC +63 917 550 9921), Papua New Guinea – Bronwyn Wright (Sir Brian Bell Foundation +61 0411 220 102) or David Valentine (Niunet +675 7601 3404), Samoa – Tony Sua Leota (Bluewave +685 72 57069), Solomon Islands – Sharon Inone (Greenery Pacific +677 73 74919), Thailand – Janice Leong (HA Asia +66 85 232 3234), Timor-Leste – Ambassador Almeida + 61 448 005 186).</p>	
<p>POST-EMERGENCY: ALL STAFF & DIRECTORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support affected staff members, and their families and colleagues. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support accessing counselling. • Compassionate leave. • Review this emergency situation response plan and the Safety & Security Manual. 	

International Travel Emergency Situation Response – 4. Staff Member Missing



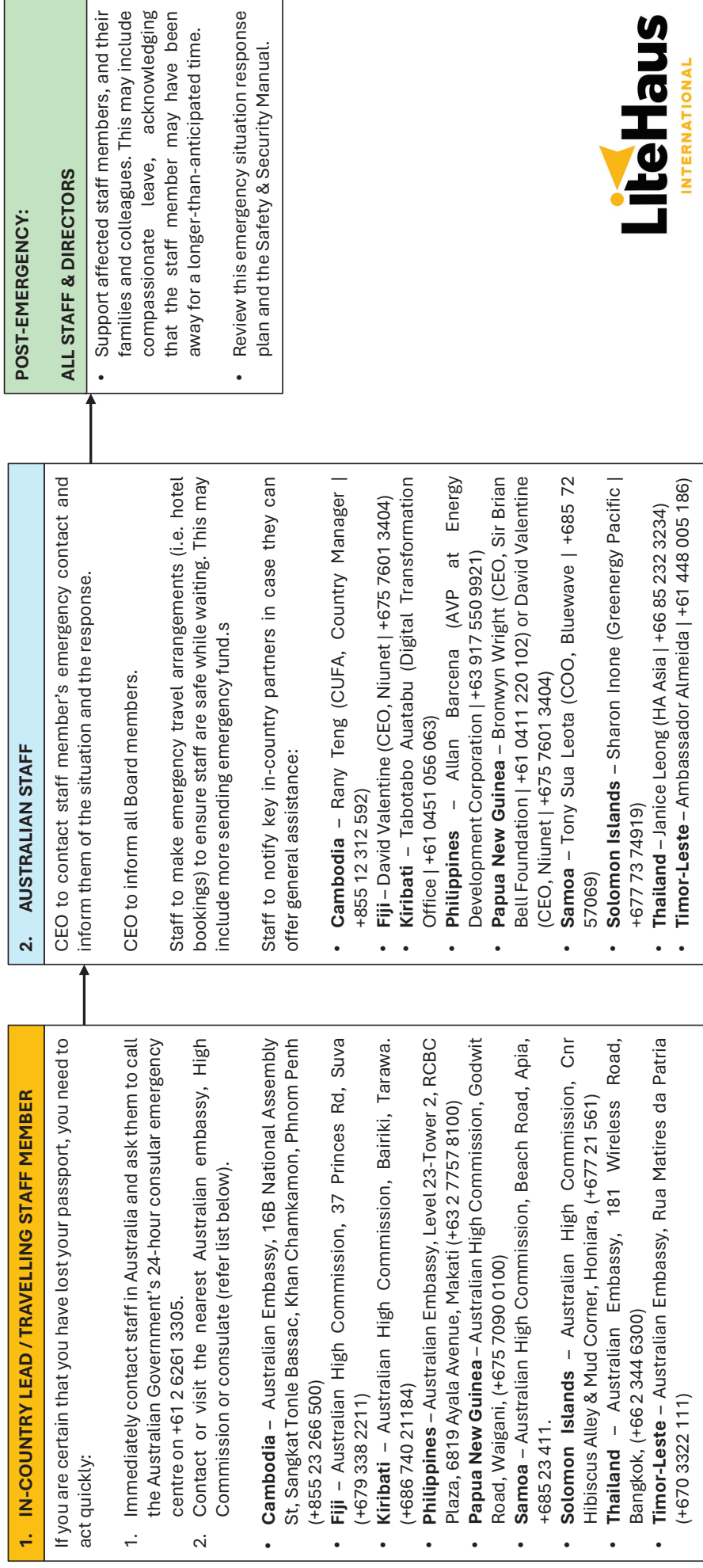
International Travel Emergency Situation Response –

5. Violent Crime Against Staff

<p>1. IN-COUNTRY LEAD / TRAVELLING STAFF MEMBER</p> <p>Your first priority is to get to safety. Take any steps you can to reduce the risk of the perpetrator assaulting you again. This could include going to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a well populated place, such as a restaurant or shop; • a police station or emergency services centre; • a hospital. <p>Contact the local emergency medical services and go to a hospital immediately. Emergency numbers are below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambodia – 119 • Fiji – 911 • Kiribati – 100 or 999 • Philippines – 911 • Papua New Guinea – 111 (ambulance), 112 (police) • Samoa – 999 • Solomon Islands – 911 or 999 • Thailand – 191 or 1669 • Timor-Leste – 112 <p>In remote locations, if possible and required, drive to the nearest hospital independent of emergency services as ambulance services are often critically underresourced.</p> <p>Immediately contact staff in Australia and do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform them of the situation and the immediate response on-the-ground. 2. Request their travel insurance documents to be sent through immediately. 3. If required due to robbery, request emergency funds. 	<p>2. AUSTRALIAN STAFF</p> <p>If required, CEO/staff to immediately activate Situation Response 1 – Medical Emergency, including medevac.</p> <p>CEO/staff to immediately mobilise emergency funds (if required), including via Western Union or local partners.</p> <p>CEO to contact staff member's emergency contact and inform them of the situation and the response.</p> <p>CEO to immediately inform the Chair of the Board of Directors, who will inform all Board members.</p> <p>Staff to call the Australian Government's 24-hour consular emergency centre on +61 2 6261 3305, who can advise hospitals and English-speaking medical support in the area, and connect to urgent mental health support.</p> <p>Staff to notify key in-country partners:</p> <p>Cambodia – Rany Teng (CUFA +855 12 312 592), Fiji – David Valentine (CEO, Niunet +675 7601 3404), Kiribati – Tabotabo Auatabu (Ministry of ICT +61 0451 056 063), Philippines – Allan Barcena (EDC +63 917 550 9921), PNG – Bronwyn Wright (CEO, Sir Brian Bell Foundation +61 0411 220 102) or David Valentine (CEO, Niunet +675 7601 3404), Samoa – Tony Sua Leota (Bluewave +685 72 57069), Solomon Islands – Sharon Inone (Greenenergy Pacific +677 73 74919), Thailand – Janice Leong (HA Asia +66 85 232 3234), Timor-Leste – Ambassador Almeida +61 448 005 186).</p>	<p>POST-EMERGENCY:</p> <p>ALL STAFF & DIRECTORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make arrangements to return the staff member to Australia. • Support affected staff members, and their families and colleagues. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support accessing counselling. • Compassionate leave. • Review this emergency situation response plan and the Safety & Security Manual. • Report the crime to local authorities.
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International Travel Emergency Situation Response –

6. Lost Passport



International Travel Risk Assessment						
Date: 21/05/2024	Traveler's Name: Jack Growden	Destination		Timor-Leste		
REQUIREMENTS		Completed	Notes			
Passport		YES	Passport Number - PA2449100			
Visa		YES				
Ticket		YES				
Travel Insurance		YES				
Itinerary		YES	Attached			
COVID vaccination		YES	3-Doses. Certificate On File			
POLITICAL RISK		IMPACT	PROBABILITY	RISK RATING	MITIGATION/COMMENTS	
Recent changes in government or political instability in the country or region.					Timor-Leste is a peaceful country. However, it is still advised to practice high degree of caution due to petty crime and limited healthcare options.	
		Low Impact	Low Probability	Low Risk	The country has been stable for years although minor disputes can escalate without warning. Jack will be travelling under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Timor-Leste Ambassador to Australia at all times.	
Significant civil unrest or demonstrations in the country.		High Impact	Low Probability	Medium Risk	MITIGATION/COMMENTS	
Level of crime in the country. Terrorist groups operating in the area Current conflicts or military actions happening in the region					Although uncommon, foreigners are advised to still be cautious and avoid going out alone at night.	
		Medium Impact	Medium Probability	Medium Risk	None to report, at present.	
		High Impact	Low Probability	Low Risk	None to report.	
HEALTH RISK		IMPACT	PROBABILITY	RISK RATING	MITIGATION/COMMENTS	
Physical exhaustion, infectious diseases and injury Endemic or epidemic health issues in the region					Diseases such as malaria are uncommon. However, dengue is endemic and only occurs on monsoon season (December - April). Insect-proof accommodation is highly suggested.	
		Medium Impact	Medium Probability	Medium Risk	MITIGATION/COMMENTS	
Social tolerance in country or region		Low Impact	Low Probability	Low Risk	MITIGATION/COMMENTS	
Cultural or religious differences that could pose a risk to visitors or expats		Low Impact	Low Probability	Low Risk	Timor-Leste has conservative standards of behaviour and dress. Religious days are closely observed. Jack will be traveling with locals and will have a guide to mitigate cultural insensitivity.	
Laws or customs that may be unfamiliar to foreigners and could lead to misunderstandings or conflicts		Medium Impact	Low Probability	Low Risk		