

My husband Tim and I are roving retirees. We travel across the globe and most of the time without incident. But when Tim's stomach pain turned into something serious, resulting in an eight-day stay in a hospital in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and over \$5,000 in medical bills, the importance of us having the right travel insurance hit home.

Thankfully we'd made it to Southeast Asia and weren't still in the U.S. where we'd spent almost five months of the year, or we might have easily added two zeros to the end of that number.

Before setting off on our recent global travels we'd done some serious research and found insurance cover that matched our unique needs as roving retirees. This one medical situation could have curtailed our travel plans for a significant time and done some major damage to our budget. Instead, our travel insurer paid for everything minus a minor \$100 excess. Our \$2,200 a year policy had just paid for itself more than twice over.

Sorting through your options to find the right cover for a short trip is tedious enough, but travelling long-term exacerbates the insurance conundrum. The longer you're on the road, the more chance you have of something going wrong, but there are very few insurance companies who will provide travellers with adequate insurance for more than 12 months. Even then, there are often all sorts of exclusions or limits that you need to be aware of to keep your cover valid.

International Health Insurance Versus Travel Insurance

When it comes to choosing between International Health Insurance and Travel Insurance there are a few things you need to consider. International healthcare policies for expats cover treatment for both emergency and routine healthcare and provide expats with flexibility regarding choice of doctor and treatment facility anywhere within their region of the cover. It's also possible to buy protection for pre-existing and chronic conditions, outpatient treatment, maternity, dental and repatriation.

In contrast, the medical component of travel insurance only covers you for emergency treatment rather than chronic conditions or general healthcare. If you do



Pattaya, Thailand: If you're travelling long-term, good travel insurance is absolutely essential.

Choosing the Right Insurance Policy for Roving Retirees

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get ill or injured, the aim of the policy is to cover costs to get you well enough to continue your trip or be repatriated back to your country of residence. Quite often a travel insurance policy will not give you a choice of where you get treated, and once you arrive home, your travel insurance ceases, and you will be responsible for the costs of any ongoing care.

Choosing a Policy That Suits You

As roving retirees who rarely remain in one country for long, and remain residents of Australia for tax purposes (including the Medicare Levy which means we qualify for Medicare cover), and have private medical insurance (payments suspended while we are overseas), Tim and I choose to buy travel insurance to cover us for emergencies. We are quite happy to get evacuated back to Australia for further treatment should the worst occur.

However, take any one of those criteria out of the equation and an interna-

tional health insurance policy might be a better option. For example, if we no longer qualified for Medicare, we might prefer to have an international health insurance policy and get treated in another country where we could access good quality healthcare more cheaply.

Travel insurance policies include cover for other travel related problems, like theft or loss of property, costs incurred by flight delays, trip interruption, cancellation or curtailment and non-emergency evacuation due to natural disasters or other incidents.

On our first three-and-a-half year journey around the world in the late '90s, we insured for the whole period with Covermore Travel Insurance. They were happy to extend our policy every 12 months for the entire

period we spent overseas. However, their maximum cover is now 18 months.

We currently insure with World Nomads, one of the few companies that will issue travellers a policy while they are on the road and continue to renew it with-

“The longer you're on the road, the more chance you have of something going wrong.”

out having to return home. We switched over for a couple of reasons. The first was they cover more “adventure activities” as standard, and we were able to upgrade our cover to include sailing in international waters when we went on a four-month Caribbean trip in 2015.

We’ve also found they are slightly cheaper for travel in the U.S. although they are much of a muchness in other regions.

World Nomads do not require you to have private health insurance in Australia, but they do require that you still qualify for Medicare if you use Australia as your home country when taking out the policy.

One of the biggest pains for roving retirees is that most travel insurance companies require you to have a return ticket or start and end the trip in your home country. That’s of little use if you’re on an indefinite, multi-year trip like us. While some companies will extend your policy while you are on the road, most have a maximum period before you have to return home and start the process again. Paradoxically, long-term cover usually limits the time you can spend back in Australia before you void it, which means you have to plan your attendance at family reunions or festive occasions carefully.

Travel Destinations

Another consideration for long-term travel insurance is the area of coverage. Because of the extortionate expense of healthcare in the U.S., any policy for a trip to North America will cost much more for the equivalent length of time travelling in say, Southeast Asia. All insurers will require you to declare your proposed destinations

BEFORE YOU LEAVE YOUR HOME COUNTRY

- Update your Medicare details and if possible get a new card if it’s due to expire while you’re away. If you can’t renew it, make arrangements for how you will receive the new one when it arrives at the residential address you have recorded.
- Make sure you have a MyGov account and connect your Medicare records. That makes it easier to prove you haven’t sought treatment for a particular ailment in Australia.
- Have all your regular health checks and keep a file with the results that you can

access, along with someone else you trust in case you are incapacitated. Use this person as your emergency contact in your passport and on your travel insurance application. (I have created a secure folder in Dropbox and given our Power of Attorney access to it. In the event of an emergency, Tim or I could easily share the folder with our insurer.)

- Keep copies of your passport in this folder as well as you’ll need to supply it in the event of an emergency.

before they quote your premium. If you change your mind and decide to go to more expensive locations, your original policy won’t cover you while you’re there and you most likely won’t get a refund for any unused portion to put towards a new one.

Depending on the length of time you will spend in each area, it can sometimes be cheaper to have a shorter policy for expensive areas and then reinsure when you exit that region. However, we’ve found it sometimes works out cheaper to just take out the more expensive policy for 12 months and be done with it. If you’re covered for the U.S. in your plan, you’ll likely be covered everywhere else.

Thankfully, new products are coming onto the market that recognise the unique situation of roving retirees, digital nomads, and long-term travellers. Safety-Wing is one such product. You insure monthly much like a subscription. The premiums get automatically deducted for

up to 12 months unless you stop them and then you must start a new policy. They have two options—Worldwide-excluding the U.S., and Worldwide. So you only need to select the U.S.-inclusive policy when you need it. It doesn’t include some of the other benefits that a comprehensive travel insurance policy does, but it does cover the basics for emergency medical treatment and other inconveniences like lost luggage and trip delays. This product also allows you to go back to your home country for up to 30 days every three months without losing your cover, which is very generous compared with other companies.

The region of cover for international health insurance also impacts significantly on the costs. A bare-bones worldwide policy excluding the U.S., Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Singapore and Taiwan with one of the big players, IMG Global, would cost Tim and I \$430 per month. That increases to \$570 per month if

WHILE YOU’RE TRAVELLING

- Add your emergency contacts to the ICE (In Case of Emergency) feature on your smartphone. You can also add potential allergies, blood type, and any other relevant information to your profile so they show up on this feature and others can access the details without having to unlock your phone. We’ve also added our Insurer’s name, their emergency phone number, and our policy number.
- Consider keeping a hard copy of these details in your wallet or your passport so they are available to emergency personnel

should the worst happen, and they don’t think to look in your phone.

- Work out a simple system for keeping your records. You can scan or take pictures of all receipts, medical records, etc., with your smartphone, and add them to a secure online folder. There are any number of apps that can help you do this but make sure you can access them on both your phone and online in case you lose your phone. We use Dropbox as general backup and storage and Dashlane for securing passwords and important documentation.
- If you seek treatment for any reason or have

a health check in another country, you should keep the reports and add the details to your records. The reports are essential if you want to claim for that consultation, and useful to establish a medical history if you’re a long-term traveller.

- A simple spreadsheet or list with the dates, contact details for the healthcare provider, and possibly the results if you get any will suffice.
- Register your travels on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) Smartraveller [website](#).

we want worldwide coverage. If we include cover for sporting injuries that rises to a whopping \$1,800 per month. Bearing in mind our most recent adventures have been bicycle tours across the U.S., that's just not tenable for our budget.

Adventure Seekers

Understanding what activities you are covered under your travel insurance policy is also tricky. It might be reasonably easy to identify what you want to do on a short holiday, but it's almost impossible to think of all the things you'll come across on a more extended adventure. Some policies do not even cover commonplace activities like water-based activities and sports.

While you might have led a reasonably mundane life at home, a new sense of freedom as you set off on your dream trip paired with once in a lifetime opportunities will likely see you doing things you might never have imagined. In the eyes of an insurance company, some of these activities are likely to be considered "high(er) risk."

If you don't insure for all your planned activities when you take out your policy, you might not be able (nor remember) to "add on" something new when your plans change. In some circumstances you can take out a second short-term policy to cover you for the time you're involved in higher risk activities, but not always.

On previous trips, we'd no idea we would go quad biking through the massive sand dunes of Namibia, skydive in New Zealand, fly in a microlight over Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, spend four months sailing around the Caribbean and hike for a month in Nepal before we left. Some activities were included in our policy automatically and we were able to pay a supplement to buy cover for others. However, a few weren't insurable at all and by participating we did so at our own risk.

Working and Volunteering

If, as a long-term traveller, you decide to work overseas to supplement your income, or even get involved in volunteer projects, it's important to know that some policies won't cover you while you're working or volunteering at all. If you think you might do either, it's essential to clarify whether you're covered by insurance beforehand. We've regularly stopped for a while in Vietnam to teach English which is allowed by our insurer.

INSURANCE COMPARISON FOR RETIREES

	Pros	Cons	Suitable For
Normal travel insurance	Covers more than just medical expenses.	Emergency medical treatment only. Requires you to start and end your journey in your country of residence. May limit the length of your trip to as little as one to three months. May have limitations on activities including working and volunteering.	Roving retirees who return home to their home country regularly. Australians who continue to qualify for Medicare or travellers who have some form of health insurance in their country of residence.
Specialised travel insurance	Covers more than emergency medical expenses. Doesn't require you to start and end your journey at home. Covers a range of adventure activities. Includes cover for some employment and volunteering opportunities.	Emergency medical treatment only. Will repatriate you to the residential address you provide. Does not provide cover once you return home. Limits the amount of time you can spend at home within the term of the policy.	Roving retirees and long-term travellers who don't want to return home regularly. Travellers who want more than just medical cover. Australians who continue to qualify for Medicare or travellers who have some form of health insurance in their country of residence.
Travel medical insurance	Cheaper than comprehensive travel insurance.	Emergency medical treatment only.	Travellers only concerned with emergency medical care. Australians still covered by Medicare or travellers who have some form of health insurance in their country of residence.
Local overseas health insurance	Cheaper than international health insurance. May have more direct billing options with local healthcare providers.	Only valid in one country and not portable. May have lower levels of cover and more limitations including choice of healthcare provider.	Expats who live long-term in a single location. Expats who no longer qualify for Medicare.
International health insurance	Can insure for worldwide health cover or specific regions. Choice of healthcare providers within that region. Routine as well as emergency healthcare.	Depending on the level of cover required it can get costly relative to other options.	Expats who live overseas long-term who may move locations. Expats who no longer qualify for Medicare.

MEDICAL DETAILS YOU NEED TO BRING WITH YOU OVERSEAS

Documents required in the case of a medical emergency while travelling overseas:

- A copy of your passport and that of any travelling companions (in case you need to be emergency evacuated out).
- The medical diagnosis and treatment plan from the doctor, hospital or clinic.
- Contacts for any places you've sought medical assistance in the last one to three years. (To check for pre-existing conditions.)

- The contact details of your regular doctor to check for pre-existing conditions.
- Your Medicare claims history for the past three years.

Accommodation, transport and tour bookings in case your trip is delayed or curtailed, and they have to reimburse you. In the case of flights, they will defray their costs if you need to be evacuated home.

Alternative Cover

There are also a couple of other options to consider if you don't feel you need all the additional features of comprehensive travel policies. You could opt for a travel medical insurance-only policy.

Alternatively, you can purchase a medical evacuation plan, often called a Medevac plan that focusses on emergency medical evacuations, international security evacuations and repatriation. The downside to this option is you may not necessarily need to be evacuated where effective medical treatment is available that will allow you to continue your travels.

In some countries, expats may qualify for free basic healthcare or can subscribe to local government programs for minimal cost. Alternatively, it might be much cheaper to buy private health cover from an insurance company in the country you are living in, rather than the larger international corporations.

Record Keeping

When you take out a travel insurance policy you need to give a residential address. Even though long-term travellers may no longer have a base in their home country, they'll still need to provide information. Using the address of a relative or friend is fine. Just be aware that's the address where you'll be repatriated to in a medical emergency.

We use a friend's address in Brisbane where we lived for many years before leaving Australia. It's the same address on our Medicare records and private health insurance policy, along with everything else we need a residential address for.

Once you've chosen your preferred

model for insurance, it's essential that you are open and honest about things like pre-existing medical conditions. Some pre-existing conditions are covered, provided the ailment is under control. If they're not, you may be able to pay an extra premium to get them included, while others are expressly excluded.

Proving your medical history over a long period of travel can prove a headache unless you prepare before you go and keep your records up to date. If you have an emergency, the last thing you want to be doing is scrambling to collate documents before they pay your hefty bills. (See box on page 13).

If you take out a comprehensive travel policy that covers you for loss or theft of valuables, you'll also need to prove when you bought each item and their worth.

COUNTRIES WITH RECIPROCAL HEALTHCARE AGREEMENTS

It's worth noting that Australia has reciprocal healthcare agreements with 11 countries including the U.K., Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Malta, Italy, Belgium, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand.

The type of cover does vary depending on each country, so it's essential that you know what you are entitled to before you decide not to buy an insurance policy altogether. Also, note that your travel insurance company will likely direct you to seek treatment under this agreement wherever possible to reduce their costs.

Before you leave home, scan receipts for individual items and put them in a designated folder you can access as needed. As with your medical history, you should also develop a system for storing new receipts for things like clothes, electronics, travel gear and valuables you buy enroute in case you have to submit a claim at a later date.

To claim for trip interruptions and cancellations you'll also need to be able to show records of flights, accommodation and tours before the insurance company will pay up. Set yourself up a logical system of filing your bookings as you make them. Unlike a short vacation, these records are a moving feast for long-term travellers.

When You Need to Make a Claim

Communication is the key to getting your claims accepted. During one incident, we stayed in contact with the emergency support team regularly to keep them up to date. A good company will get in touch with you to see how they can help, but there's no harm in taking the initiative and keeping them in the loop as the situation unfolds.

In a medical emergency, especially one where costs can escalate rapidly, your insurer may agree to go guarantor for fees up front. That way you don't have to outlay funds and then go through the claims process afterward. If they do agree to this option, your claim is essentially approved before the incident even concludes. You don't have to worry about blowing your credit limit, transferring funds internationally, or asking a family member to become your guarantor until the claim is approved.

However, insurance companies will require a swathe of documentation before they will do this. If you've organised your records beforehand as suggested, that process will be a breeze.

Tim and I also follow up after the emergency to see how the incident has impacted on future policies. For example, if you need treatment for some medical conditions during one policy term, it may be considered a pre-existing condition in any new policy.

If you're travelling long-term, good travel insurance is absolutely essential as eventually something will go awry and the consequences of not having it are too grim, and financially crippling, to contemplate.

The information I've provided is general advice, so it's essential that you find the right solution for your unique circumstances. ■