

Out of Harm's Way

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Rajiv Gupta, chairman and CEO of the Philadelphia-based chemical company Rohm and Hass, toured a company plant in Sao Paolo, Brazil, in April. His wife accompanied him so they could take a short vacation afterward. Before leaving, Gupta told Evan Jenkins, his company's director of corporate security, that he did not want any elaborate security precautions, because this would just be a short, casual trip. Jenkins disagreed. A manager at the Sao Paolo plant had already called to warn him about the city's high rate of violent crime, particularly in the area immediately surrounding the airport Gupta would use.

When Gupta and his wife cleared customs in Brazil, a recently retired colonel in the Sao Paolo police department awaited, ready to act as their tour guide, translator and unobtrusive protector. He took them sightseeing, recommended restaurants and kept them from drifting into rough neighborhoods. "It as an additional expense, but you have to do it if you want to see some parts of the world," says Jenkins, who spent 22 years in the Secret Service and another five as director of corporate security for drug manufacturer Wyeth before taking his current job.

Executives like Gupta often visit business centers that may abut areas of dire poverty, especially in developing countries, and some of these areas suffer from high rates of crime. Those who arrive in a private jet, travel in a chauffeured company car, and stay in the best hotels make obvious, and, in some cases, tempting targets – if they do not take sensible precautions.

HAZARD A GUESS

To decide which precautions are sensible, we can begin by gathering information about our destination from online sources.

The travel alert website run by the U.S. State Department (travel.state.gov) lists problem countries and details the nature and extent of their risks, along with precautions we should take. The Centers for Disease Control website (www.cdc.gov/travel) provides information about health risks around the world. The medical assistance company International SOS (www.internationalsos.com) also provides medical alerts and information such as vaccination requirements for travelers.

Travel risk consulting firms provide more in-depth and customized assessments and recommendations. New York-based Marsh Kroll (www.krollworldwide.com) is perhaps the best known of these firms. It provides intelligence reports on a multitude of destinations through its partnership with iJet Travel Risk Management (www.ijet.com) of Annapolis, Md. Marsh Kroll will create a comprehensive report on the risks we may encounter, including kidnapping, other violent crime, terrorism and health problems. It updates the information continuously and sends alerts via email or text messages to cell phones or pagers. It also provides a response center, which advises travelers on how to handle security and health problems, and will arrange to have help sent, if necessary.

Most experts aver that the main factor bearing on our security overseas is how the local population perceives us. This is particularly important when traveling to countries where anti-American sentiment is widespread, or to developing countries that have endemic poverty and crime. “If you’re the CEO of a Fortune 100 company, what do you represent to the world?” asks Jack Stradley, who heads the training department at Kroll. The firm has to deal with this issue often. For example, because Kroll has several hundred people on the ground in Iraq, Stradley says company CEO Mike Cherkasky is at particularly high risk when traveling there.

Animal Rights activists may target the head of a large pharmaceutical company; environmentalists might have reason to harass executives or board members of oil or logging companies. “Think of who would like to do you harm, and who will actually act,” advises Richard Isaacs, senior vice president of The LUBRINCO Group (www.lubrinco.com), a New York-based vulnerability management firm.

Merely displaying the trappings of affluence is a dangerous indulgence when we travel abroad. In a number of countries, including Thailand, Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil and the Philippines, kidnapping wealthy individuals and executives for ransom is not uncommon. For a stretch of several months in the past year, the Philippine government estimated that there was a kidnapping of this nature every day in Manila.

Violence is not the only risk factor. For those in less-than-ideal health, the threat of a medical emergency while abroad is a pressing concern. Experts advise us to ensure adequate medical facilities will be available. We should also make allowances for the possibility we may encounter local health risks. In sub-Saharan Africa, malaria and cholera are growing problems and AIDS is rampant. While traveling there, some have gone to the admittedly

extreme lengths of bringing along companions of the same blood type in case they suffer injuries requiring a transfusion.

If we have preexisting health issues, it is important not to assume that medical facilities will always be at hand, even in developed countries. James Walter, president of the gravel group Crossing Boundaries, was in Venice last fall when one of his companions had sudden, severe abdominal pains during dinner. Walter asked a waiter to call an ambulance, but none arrived. “We learned quickly that in Venice an ambulance is a boat, and that no amount of shouting or pleading would bring it any faster,” he says. The boat arrived 45 minutes later. “If the man had been having a heart attack, he would have been dead.” Luckily, it turned out to be a kidney stone, a painful, but not life-threatening, condition.

International SOS provides lists of vetted doctors around the world, and in a serious medical emergency, it will send a medically equipped Learjet to transport us to a facility providing high-quality care. The company also allows us to store our medical records online so that a physician overseas can access them in an emergency.

PERILS AND PRECEPTS

The measures appropriate to guard against these hazards will depend on their character and degree. If the risks are low to moderate – essentially, if our wealth or position, but not our specific identity, makes us a target – measures we can arrange ourselves may suffice.

The most basic step is to choose a secure mode of travel. For example, when deciding among fractional ownership programs, jet charter companies or other private aircraft options, security considerations should be topmost in our minds. Fractional programs and charters vary in their safety strategies; some provide seamless security and may customize their offerings specifically to suit our needs. Private Jet Services Group, for example, a New Hampshire-based charter company, provided one client two Gulfstream V jets painted exactly alike. The client and some of his security detail flew in one, and the rest of his staff flew in the other; it was impossible to tell which plane held the client, Private Jet Services President Greg Raiff notes.

Leading hotels, especially those in hazardous locales, often have security experts who will see to our needs. Jimmy Chin, regional director of risk management at the Peninsula Hotel in New York, says he can recommend one of several security firms to his guests, and his staff often makes accommodations for those with security needs. “When people notify us of

known threats, including death threats, company problems and personal issues, we can ensure that the wrong people don't get in the door," he says. The Shangri-La and the Ritz-Carleton in Dubai, of the United Arab Emirates, for example, can provide guests with a secure vehicle and driver.

We may also wish to review the hotel's basic security measures and as whether, for example, it has backup generators (the power outage in the northeastern United States in August 2003 revealed that many high-end hotels did not), and if in a very high-risk country, the extent to which it is secure against terrorist attacks, including poison gas and bombings. Leading-edge hotels will be able to reverse their ventilation equipment at the first sign of trouble, and may have structures capable of withstanding all but the largest blasts.

There are also a number of simple ways to lower our profile and our risk on the road. We should guard the privacy of itinerary; the fewer people with access to it, the better. We may also wish to travel with a credit card registered in the name of a holding company so that our name does not appear on hotel or restaurant bills.

Isaacs recommends sending staff ahead to make as many arrangements as possible. They can drive the routes we intend to take and make sure the roads and exits are still open. "You can arrange for pre-check-ins at hotels and pre-arrange parking spaces your you can keep an eye on your car and driver," Isaacs recommends. "You may even be able to preorder from the menu in restaurants." By addressing these seemingly mundane chores, our staff can help reduce the time we spend being vulnerable.

EXPERIENCED ENTOURAGE

Those of us at high risk – celebrities, high-profile chief executives and political figures, for example – should leave nothing to chance. In addition to the measures above, it often makes sense to hire a bodyguard. The best way to do so is to work with a full-service security agency that can assess the risk and provide both defensive training and protection, with armored vehicles if necessary. Kroll provides all of these services, as does Control Risks Group in London. (For others, see "En Garde" in *Worth*, August 2004, page 110.)

Our bodyguard should not look like a bruiser our of central casting. "Being surrounded by seven guys with guns is making a statement," Stradley notes. "And it may not be the statement you want to make. For most people, a security detail will consist of one person with a intimate knowledge of the

locale and a talent for being hard to spot. “One of my clients hires an off-duty police officer whenever he goes to New York City,” Isaacs says. “It’s basically someone to drive his kids around. It’s so they don’t get kidnapped, but it works well for the whole family. The guy can park wherever he wants, and the family never gets hassled.”

No matter what our risk profile, security experts strongly discourage us from carrying a weapon ourselves. “We ask people not to carry a gun because they could put their security detail in jeopardy,” says Joe Russo, vice president of special operations of T&M Protection Resources in New York. When traveling, guns can become a volatile issue. Many countries only allow police to carry weapons. “Luckily,” Stradley adds, “the vast majority of people don’t need armed guards.”

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