





# EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

From terrorist attacks to muggings, there are always going to be threats to your security abroad. **Felicity Cousins** reports on who can help you be prepared

Two decades ago, business travellers were sent out of the office with only travel insurance and a few notes on the destination in their pockets. Nowadays, safety and security is of utmost importance, and the introduction of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act in 2007 has made employers even keener to keep their most valuable assets – their employees – safe.

## WHO CAN HELP

There is plenty of advice available from bodies such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([fco.gov.uk](http://fco.gov.uk)) and risk management firms. Key Travel, a travel management company, works with crisis management and personal protection specialists the Anvil Group to keep clients up-to-date with changing situations across the globe. It has developed the KT Risk Manager system, which

links employee tracking with risk-intelligent services, sending out alerts when incidents happen.

Simon Bennett, head of product for Key Travel, says: "Business travellers need to look closely at their security policy. If you are travelling to New York, your policy is going to be very different than if you were going to Nairobi. With

**'In most cases the biggest threat is not incidents such as Mumbai – it's petty criminals or insulting a local'**

the KT Risk Manager system, if there was an earthquake, staff worldwide would be able to see who was there and advise them on what to do."

Abiding by company travel policy means employers should know where their staff are at all times. Itinerary-based tracking works up to a point, but it is not foolproof. Jonathan Simpson Tarling, commercial director for global security company Red24, says: "Some of our clients may

use up to 20 different travel management companies for their travel needs, and even if you have all this [traveller tracking] in place, you are always susceptible to instances where, for example, the PA in the South Africa office books with a different hotel or airline. Then you find yourself believing you have only two people in Mumbai, when actually you have three or four."

In the current economic climate, companies may be looking to cut costs, but Simpson Tarling says his firm's revenue has nearly doubled in the past year. "Business travel may be decreasing, but companies still need us, as they are exploring new markets [with new risks] such as India or Mexico," he says.

## BEFORE YOU GO

Control Risks, Red24, Pilgrims Group and the Anvil Group are among the companies that analyse political and social changes across the world to assess risk factors,

offering 24-hour advice and assistance. Even before a business traveller sets off, they can be kept well informed of developments at their destination. Last year, Control Risks launched a joint venture with International SOS – specialists in providing healthcare to corporations, governments and individuals – with the aim of bringing medical and travel security services together.

Jan-Coos Geesink, CEO of the joint venture between Control Risks and International SOS, says: “When a client books their trip they will get email alerts about the place they are going to. If there is a really serious incident, we alert people through text messaging as it is more direct.” Control Risks releases an annual “risk map” showing areas of high and low risk, backed up with country analysis and reports for the year ahead.

Pilgrims Group offers seminars to prepare travellers for various situations, including a one-day business traveller course. The standard course covers how to stay safe and what to do if you find yourself in danger, as well as incorporating pre-departure planning, research, risk assessment and country reports.

Sam Mostyn, training manager for Pilgrims Group, says: “Some modules cover IT security and corporate espionage, but we also identify risks and encourage self-help.”

### STAY CONNECTED

Itinerary-based tracking is now being backed up with technology that pinpoints a traveller’s exact position. Red24 launched its third satellite in January this year to ensure complete communication for people in remote destinations such as Iraq.

At the other end of the scale, it also offers the latest GPS technology. Simpson Tarling says: “The beauty of it is that it is a normal handset, so a business traveller will have one already. Geonix has designed an application that you can download to your phone, so if you are in trouble you can press a button and go straight through to the 24-hour



‘Count the doors from your room to the fire exit. If there’s a fire you need to know where you’re going’

security people, who will see exactly where you are.”

Pilgrims Group also has a 24-hour panic button, but Control Risks uses another system. Geesink says: “If people are in a dangerous area then we agree a frequency of contact – say, every two to three hours. It’s one thing tracking a GPS device, but that device is not necessarily with the person. If we don’t hear from someone when we expect to, we check where they were, where they were going and put the next steps of crisis management into action.”

### CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Even if you are armed with information and your company knows exactly where you are, the terrorist attacks in Mumbai at the end of last year highlighted just how unpredictable the world can

be. Geesink says: “We can’t prevent things from happening but we can make sure people are ready to respond. We can organise a discreet evacuation.” On average, Control Risks and International SOS perform an evacuation every half an hour. “SOS has flying clinics or, if need be, we can charter a Boeing 747,” he adds.

### HOME ALONE

Business travellers may be prepared for incidents abroad, but Pilgrims Group courses have a strong focus on what they are leaving behind too. David Freear, the company’s director of operations, says: “High-profile business people are targets for criminal gangs not only abroad but at home. The traveller may be aware of this, but what if their son is on Facebook saying ‘My dad’s going away for three days’? Suddenly the family is vulnerable.” The course focuses on training relatives and staff to be security-aware and to be discreet about family movements.

The joint venture has 28 alarm centres around the world to handle multiple incidents. Geesink says: "Mumbai happened at the same time as the Bangkok airport seizure, so we had an enormous surge of calls from that area."

Red24's Simpson Tarling says: "Kenya and Mumbai are good cases to compare. We predicted what would happen in Kenya [after the 2007 elections] before it hit the headlines,

as it's our analysts' job to keep their eye on the world. With political violence you can often see it coming, but with Mumbai we didn't know it was going to happen, so we had to move to the 24/7 response service."

David Freear, Pilgrims Group's director of operations, says that in the case of Mumbai, when gunmen stormed two hotels, the Oberoi and the Taj Mahal Palace

and Tower, the advice given to clients on the ground would have changed minute by minute. "At first we would have said stay in your room and jam the door shut, but then there was a fire so you have to reassess the situation. The problem is that terrorists are always thinking of new ways [to attack], so we try to give people practical information so that if something has never happened before, they can think through their options in seconds."



### KNOW THE BASICS

Ultimately, tracking devices, information alerts and preparation are pretty useless without some common sense. Simpson Tarling says: "If it's a new place, don't assume you understand the culture. The majority of cases we deal with, and the biggest threat to the traveller, is not incidents such as Mumbai – it's petty criminals,

getting into the wrong cab or insulting a local."

Mostyn of Pilgrims Group adds: "Leave your main wallet at home and have a spare one for when you travel. Take only one card and a bit of cash. If someone threatens you then you can just hand it over without worrying about the photo of your kids or other bank cards and personal information."

Mostyn advises checking out the evacuation plan whenever you arrive at a hotel. "Business travellers may be staying in top places but a lot of their windows don't open because of air conditioning. Count the doors from your room to the fire exit. If there is a fire at two in the morning and the corridor is filled with black smoke, you need to know where you are going."

David Freear adds: "You may have travelled to a place 1,000 times before with no problems, but it could be the next trip when something happens." ■

### CONTACTS

anvilgroup.com  
 blog.red24.com  
 controlrisks.com  
 fco.gov.uk  
 keytravel.co.uk  
 pilgrimsgroup.com  
 red24.info

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