There has been an increasing trend for people to travel internationally. More than 3.5 million Australians travel overseas each year. Personal safety has become more of an individual responsibility as fewer people are going on programmed package tours. Individual travel through hosteling and backpacking appears to have become more popular as travelers seek more cost-effective means of traveling and obtaining accommodation. International hosteling and backpacking organizations, such as the Youth Hostels Association (YHA), have evolved to provide a major networked accommodation and travel resource for members. YHA, a not-for-profit hosteling organization, has over 3.5 million members and more than 4,000 hostels in 60 countries throughout the world, attracting mainly young travelers but open to travelers of all age groups. YHA also conducts regular travelers’ information evenings around Australia, as well as provides travel agent facilities, travel insurance, and

Level of Concern and Sources of Information of a Group of Brisbane Hostelers for Personal Safety and Terrorism When Traveling Abroad

Peter A. Leggat, MD, PhD, DrPH, FAFPHM, FACTM,* Deborah Mills, MBBS, MACTM; and Richard Speare, BVSc (Hons), MBBS (Hons), PhD, FAFPHM, FACTM, MACVS

*Anton Breinl Centre for Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia; †Travel Doctor, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

DOI: 10.1111/j.1708-8305.2007.00113.x

Background. Little is known about the level of concern and sources of information of hostelers concerning personal safety and terrorism. This study was designed to investigate these in the Australian context.

Methods. In 2006, self-administered questionnaires were distributed to hostelers attending a travelers’ information evening in Brisbane.

Results. Forty questionnaires (60.8%) were returned. Over two thirds of attendees were women (71.4%). About two thirds of the hostelers attending the travelers’ information evening reported being aged 29 years or younger (64.2%). Anticipated main destinations were Europe (68.3%), Asia (14.3%), and North America (11.9%). Nearly two thirds (63.4%) intended to travel in more than 8 weeks time or were not sure. Of those departing within 8 weeks, only 40% had sought travel health advice from their general practitioner and/or travel clinic. Nonmedical sources of information on travel health included travel books and guides (40.5%), Internet (35.7%), and travel agents (19.0%). On a five-point rating scale (1 being not concerned to 5 being extremely concerned), median ratings of hostelers’ concern for personal safety (4.0) was significantly higher than for terrorism (2.5), with the range being 1 to 5 in each case (p < 0.001). Nearly three quarters (73.8%) of hostelers would seek personal safety advice from multiple sources, and sources of information included the Internet (69.0%, 29), travel books and guides (59.5%), physicians (57.1%), and travel agents (45.2%). Only three (7.1%) nominated the physician as their only source of personal safety advice.

Conclusions. Hostelers attending a travelers’ information night in Australia expressed more concern for their personal safety when traveling than for terrorism. Since this group of travelers uses multiple sources of information with the Internet most commonly used, Web sites that provide accurate and relevant information in an acceptable format could play an important role in supporting this group. It is important that policies being promoted by travel health advocacy groups in Australia continue to advocate that travelers seek travel health advice from a qualified source early, preferably around 6 to 8 weeks before travel, and that personal safety be discussed as part of the travel health consultation.

Corresponding Author: Peter A. Leggat, MD, PhD, DrPH, FAFPHM, FACTM, Anton Breinl Centre for Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland 4811, Australia. E-mail: peter.leggat@jcu.edu.au

© 2007 International Society of Travel Medicine, 1195-1982
Journal of Travel Medicine, Volume 14, Issue 2, 2007, 112–116
Level of Concern and Sources of Information for Personal Safety and Terrorism

The level of concern regarding personal safety and terrorism has been heightened following recent terrorist events, especially in the United States, Bali, UK, and Spain, which have involved travelers from Australia. Little is known about the sources of health information provided to hostlers, especially on issues such as personal safety and terrorism. This study was designed to investigate where Australian hostlers sought travel health advice, especially on personal safety, and whether they were concerned about personal safety and terrorism in their travel.

Methods

All participants at a YHA travelers’ information night in February 2006 held in Brisbane were given an anonymous self-completion questionnaire before the commencement of the evening. The single A4 questionnaire collected information on age, sex, intended main overseas destination of hostlers, when they were traveling, where they sought travel health advice, their level of concern regarding personal safety and terrorism, and where they source information on personal safety. Nominated sources of travel health advice or personal safety advice included general practitioners (GPs), travel clinics, pharmacies, travel agents, travel books and guides, Internet, and other specified sources. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Results

Demographic Data

From the 69 hostlers attending the travelers’ information evening, 42 questionnaires (60.9%) were returned. The age and sex distribution is given in Table 1. The main destinations of hostlers were Europe (68.3%, 28), Asia (14.6%, 6), United States (12.2%, 5), and other destinations (4.9%, 2). Nearly two thirds (63.4%, 26) intended to travel in more than 8 weeks time or were not sure (Table 1).

Sources of Travel Health Advice

Just over one third of hostlers (38.1%, 16) had already sought travel health advice from their GP and/or travel clinic. Of the hostlers departing within 8 weeks, only 40% (6/15) had sought travel advice from their GP and/or travel clinic (p > 0.05). More hostlers nominated their GP (28.6%, 12) than a travel clinic (23.8%, 10) as a source of travel health advice they had already consulted. Less than half of hostlers had already sought travel health advice from multiple sources (45.2%, 19). Sources of information included travel books and guides (40.5%, 17), physicians (38.1%, 16), Internet (35.7%, 15), travel agents (19.0%, 8), and other sources (2, 4.8%).

Concern About Personal Safety and Terrorism

On a five-point rating scale (1 being not concerned to 5 being extremely concerned), median ratings of hostlers indicated that they were significantly more concerned about personal safety (4.0) than terrorism (2.5) (p < 0.001), with the range being 1 to 5 in each case (Figure 1), but there was no significant difference by sex (p > 0.05). There was a significant positive correlation between concern about personal safety and concern about terrorism (p < 0.05).
Sources of Information on Personal Safety

Nearly three quarters (73.8%, 31) of hostelers would seek advice concerning personal safety abroad from multiple sources. Sources of information included the Internet (69.0%, 29), travel books and guides (59.5%, 25), physicians (57.1%, 24), travel agents (45.2%, 19), and other sources (11.9%, 5). Three hostelers (7.1%) nominated a physician as their only source of information on personal safety. More hostelers nominated GPs (47.6%, 20) than travel clinics (31.1%, 13) as a source of information on personal safety.

Discussion

The reasonable response rate for this type of study may have been due to hostelers’ interest in the topic. The demographic profile of hostelers as being predominantly younger women is consistent with previous studies of hostelers in Queensland. However, the attendees of the travelers’ information evening probably represent a select group of hostelers, who may have an interest in their health and welfare while traveling. In addition to having a relatively small sample size, one of the major limitations of cross-sectional studies using self-administered questionnaires is that what people report may differ from what they actually do. The study may also have limited generalizability beyond Australia.

Sources of Travel Health Advice

One of the biggest challenges for travel health professionals and the travel industry has been getting travelers to present for pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner. It has been found in previous studies that only 44% of travelers were seeking pretravel health advice from a qualified source in a timely manner.

Figure 1 Distribution of level of concern of hostelers concerning personal safety and terrorism.
Conclusions

Hostelers attending a travelers’ information night in Australia expressed more concern for their personal safety when traveling than for terrorism. Since this group of travelers uses multiple sources of information with the Internet most commonly used, Web sites that provide accurate and relevant information in an acceptable format could play an important role in supporting this group. It is important that policies being promoted by travel health advocacy groups in Australia continue to advocate that travelers seek travel health advice from a qualified source early, preferably around 6 to 8 weeks before travel, and that personal safety be discussed as part of the travel health consultation.

Sources of Information on Personal Safety

The Internet was an important source of information on personal safety for hostelers, which is not surprising given the extensive government advertising in Australia promoting the DFAT site for travelers.22 The Internet was used nearly twice as much as a source of information on personal safety compared to general travel health advice. Physicians were also regarded as an important source of personal safety advice, although only about half of GPs in a New Zealand study reported giving safety advice to travelers.24 About 70% of travel clinics reported giving personal safety advice in an international survey,25 but GPs who saw a greater proportion of travelers in their practice were also more likely to give safety advice.24 Little has been published on other sources of information for personal safety, including travel agents and travel books and guides. A study of in-flight magazines in Australia certainly revealed a paucity of advice concerning personal safety of travelers.18 More research is needed on what Web sites were accessed for personal safety advice and what information was sought. At present, the major link for personal safety on the YHA Web site is to the DFAT smartraveler Web site,22 with general travel health links to the THAG Web site.12

Concern About Personal Safety and Terrorism

Although many hostelers are concerned about their personal safety when traveling abroad, it is an often neglected area in travel medicine. Personal safety should be one of the most important areas for travel health advisers to cover when giving advice to travelers going to virtually any country since accidents and injuries are an important cause of morbidity and mortality for travelers.20 In addition, a survey of nearly 1,000 travel insurance claims in Australia revealed that loss, theft, and muggings comprised one third of claims.21 The lower level of concern of hostelers toward terrorism was interesting, particularly in view of the prominence given to this topic at the DFAT site for travelers.22 Nonetheless, those hostelers who were concerned about personal safety were also concerned about terrorism. Travelers should also be advised about important safety nets, such as health and travel insurance and finding medical assistance abroad.21
Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank YHA in Queensland for their assistance with this project. In particular, the authors are most grateful to those hostelers who completed the questionnaire. We acknowledge the assistance of Dr Frances W. Leggat with data coding and entry.

Declaration of Interests

The first two authors have given travel health presentations without remuneration to YHA in Queensland. The authors had no other conflicts of interest.

References