



2. Trip Planning and Preparation

- The planning window for a trip abroad can be anywhere from 1 to 2 weeks to upwards of 3 months, depending on the destination, nature and purpose of the trip. Travellers rely on a variety of resources when planning and booking – online travel reservation services, especially other travellers comments, friends and family experience, airlines, and travel agents. It is important to note that while many travellers undertake much of their research online, using booking services such as Expedia and TripAdvisor (the latter was mentioned more often in focus groups than it was in the survey), there is a segment of travellers (29%) who continue to rely on the services of travel agents. While the extent to which travel agents utilize the resources of www.travel.gc.ca, receive travel alerts, and share information about safe travel varies, they remain a key conduit through to their clients and the travelling public in general.
- For the most part, the degree to which travellers prepare for their trips and the steps taken in planning international travel are fairly consistent, regardless of the nature or purpose of the trip. Notably, the results for 2018 show that travellers are generally taking more steps to prepare for a trip abroad to a destination with which they are not familiar than they were in 2008. In particular, many more now arrange for health or travel insurance (almost double what was found in 2008, from 27% to 49%), and of those who do, almost three-quarters are familiar with the terms, conditions and exclusions of their coverage. Overall, these results suggest that international travellers are paying more attention to these types of details. There are, however, significant age differences in that this practice is more common among people aged 55 and older.
- In a broader context, and on a somewhat cautionary note, we found a slight uptick (7-point increase since 2008) in the number of travellers who now say that it's impossible to anticipate what might arise when travelling abroad so their general approach is to handle situations as they arise, and a corresponding decline in those who say it's more important to be prepared. Overall, however, the majority (58%) prefer to be prepared. Again, however, views are age dependent: younger people, and those travelling with friends are more likely to take the approach of addressing situations when they come up, while older people and those travelling with family members are more inclined to want to be prepared.
- In both the survey and focus groups, travellers indicated that their first order of business when planning a trip is usually booking flights and accommodations, in addition to checking the weather, and giving some thought to the types of activities and attractions they may wish to incorporate into their itinerary. Since cost is a key consideration, travellers tend to focus first on those items which, combined, represent the largest share of the overall cost of the trip. In focus groups, we heard that for many travellers it is important to at least have the first night's accommodation booked when travelling abroad. This provides a sense of reassurance upon arriving at the destination. After that, some travellers seem prepared to 'play it by ear,' an approach which is more common among younger travellers and those who tend to book on the spur of the moment.
- Additionally, this year's results show an increase in the number of travellers who say they check travel advisories when travelling to a destination with which they are not familiar (up from 20% in 2007 and 21% in 2008, to 31% in 2018). Nevertheless, it is important to note that this particular step remains a common practice for just under one-third of international travellers. In focus groups, participants did flag safety and security issues among the considerations when selecting a destination and planning a trip abroad, but the majority tend to rely on information and recommendations from friends and family who have been to the location for advice, Google searches and online tourist information provided by the regional or state government or tourist bureau to put context around any official information they receive. It was clear that many participants tended to land on a Government of Canada travel advisory inadvertently, while conducting their search, rather than having actively sought it out.