

If you're an American senior and you haven't traveled abroad since 9/11/01, be aware that many world destinations are different today than they were in those peaceful days. First, of all be prepared for many inconveniences brought on by tightening security measures. Of course, air traffic is an ever-increasing emotional and physical challenge for seniors, so be sure you're prepared to do it.

As for determining if a destination is senior-friendly, from the standpoint of personal danger, first check with sources on the internet, particularly the US State Department, to determine which countries are on the unfriendly or ongoing violence list. Keep up on news reports to be sure you have the latest information. If you have friends, neighbors or relatives who've traveled recently, consult with them about their experiences before making your plans.

Of course, as far as accommodations for seniors are concerned, you should use the same sources of information to help you make your plans. Depending on your physical abilities or disabilities, choose countries where there are modern medical services, facilities for those who need help getting around, high-level sanitation, closely-monitored food quality and other special needs you may require. As we aged in the 15 years following my retirement, we realized we couldn't handle many of the activities we had done before. We stopped signing up for trips and excursions that involved doing considerable walking, climbing steps, standing in long lines and other activities that taxed us beyond our abilities.

We find now that cruise ships are the most accommodating for the elderly. Once aboard and settled in a cabin, we can do as much or as little as we want. It also helps if one spouse is more active than the other, because there are excursions and ship events that one can attend while the other enjoys less taxing activities, such as the pool, games, lectures and other shipboard events.

Two of the best sources for finding senior-friendly tours, cruises or other destinations, is the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and Elderhostel. The latter may be of particular interest to seniors who want to combine touring with education, because the organization has worldwide destinations that include comprehensive lectures, demonstrations, entertainment and other activities that involve hands-on participation. If you want to do something truly constructive on your next senior experience, contact Habitat for Humanity. You may find yourself next to Jimmy Carter as you repair a flood-damaged house in New Orleans.