



DFAT calls in outstanding debts

In the past four years over \$1.3 million in travellers' emergency no-interest loans have been paid by the Federal Government to Australians stranded overseas, according to DFAT, but only \$722,000 has been recovered.

The loans are available to Australians without money for return airfares or who get stuck with medical or accommodation bills and as prisoner loans to Australians, mainly in Third World jails, so they can buy food, medicines, toiletries or other essentials.

When no other source of funds is available – either from family or friends – the government steps in and recipients sign an undertaking that those monies will be repaid on their return to Australia.

“The timing of repayments varies depending on circumstances and capacity to repay,” a DFAT spokesman said. “The department has a robust system to pursue debts, including regular follow-up through letters and phone calls.”

DFAT is now seeking to pursue some of the outstanding monies through court action. People who have not repaid loans can be refused passport renewals.

Quality Travel insurance is an absolute.

Additionally travellers must consider backup assistance for behind-the-scenes travel arrangements to be activated to spring into action in case of an emergency, foreign country evacuation or personal drama .

An experienced Travel Agent who is aware of and in control of travel components can be the saving grace as they can advise, co-ordinate and assist not only with travel arrangements but also communicate with relevant overseas and Australian Government departments, travel insurance providers and family.
