

General guidance when visiting an earthquake-prone country

The information provided below is general guidance that follows best international practice. It is also based on experience of Reynolds International Ltd (RIL) staff acquired over the last six years of providing earthquake preparedness advice to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in places such as Iran, Nepal and Romania, among others. RIL, however, cannot accept any liability with respect to the information that is provided here, which is given in good faith.

If you are not sure whether the country you are intending to visit is prone to earthquakes, information can be obtained about its seismic history and potential seismic hazard on the US Geological Survey website: www.earthquake.usgs.gov.

The following guidance assumes that you will be staying in a hotel or guest house as independent travellers rather than with private individuals. All the following advice is available as a PDF so that you can download it and copy it to your own computer and/or print it out to keep with your earthquake kit.

Before you travel

1. Prepare a small **personal earthquake kit** to take with you (below).
2. Find out where the British Embassy/Consulate is located relative to where you intend to visit/stay and the relevant contact details (you can do this online: www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/find-an-embassy/).
3. Familiarise yourself with the advice on **what to do in an earthquake** (below).
4. Ensure you have adequate travel insurance.
5. Ensure you have emergency contact details of your next of kin and your GP with you.
6. Make several copies of your passport photo page. If you are able to, make a colour scan of the photo page and laminate it and keep a copy in your earthquake kit, in your briefcase/handbag, and in your jacket (plus a couple of spares). This helps if you need to show who you are and, if you do not have your passport with you, can be used for identification purposes.

Personal earthquake kit

- A. **Before you travel** – prepare a small personal earthquake survival kit per person in a small backpack, comprising (as appropriate):
- First Aid kit;
 - Whistle and key-ring torch;
 - Water purification tablets;
 - Packets of high-energy foods (enough to last 24 hours);
 - Wet wipes;
 - A small wash bag containing (as appropriate): spare toothbrush, toothpaste, flannel, soap, feminine hygiene items, toilet paper, tissues, condoms (can be used as a water container);
 - Spare prescription medication;
 - Spare spectacles/contact lens kit;
 - Pen and small pad of paper;
 - Small pair of scissors and/or multi-tool penknife;
 - Collapsible umbrella;
 - Emergency money (small denominations).

All of these items can be packed into a small space and do not take up much weight. Seal things like toilet paper in re-sealable plastic bag to keep it dry. Pack all these items in your

check-in luggage, if flying. If travelling with children add items appropriate for their age, and especially for babies and infants.

The whistle and key-ring torch are essential and are probably the most important items in this list. Ensure that you keep these on your person throughout the day and within reach on your bedside table at night. If you become trapped after an earthquake either can be used to make your presence known; the whistle, even if weakly blown, is likely to be heard by rescuers/rescue dogs.

If you are staying with relatives or with private individuals, they should already have an earthquake kit for their residence, sufficient and suitable for the number of people staying, including guests. Check with them before you travel that they have such a kit and related supplies. Expect that it is unusual for people to be so well prepared, so when they tell you that they are, it will be a comforting surprise.

B. *Once you are in country* – As soon as possible after arrival at your destination and on unpacking your suitcase:

- Check the emergency escape routes from your room, important also in case of fire and know where the assembly points are located;
- Put a bottle of water (minimum 0.5 litre) per person (more if in a hot climate) in your backpack.
- Prepare your personal earthquake bag and place it where you can easily reach it as you leave your room.
- Ensure that you have easily accessible a jacket suitable for the time of year and weather conditions. If in winter, ensure you have hat, gloves, and waterproof jacket (supplemented by your umbrella to help keep you dry); in summer, sunglasses, sunhat and sun screen cream; an umbrella can be used to provide shade as a parasol.
- At night, place your whistle and torch beside your bed. Try to ensure that there is no picture with glass front above your bed. Place footwear upside down or under cover so that in the event that glass from such a picture is shattered, fragments do not go into your footwear and cause lacerations when you put the footwear on.

The idea behind this personal earthquake kit is that, immediately after surviving a major earthquake, you can grab your earthquake bag, evacuate safely and without undue delay from the premises where you are staying, with enough personal supplies to survive for 24 hours without needing help from anyone else.

General behaviour

Earthquake preparedness is mostly common sense and there is no reason to be paranoid about the potential risks. However, in a seismically active region it is best to be aware of your surroundings and take some simple precautions so you do not put yourself at unnecessary risk. Just as you need to be aware of traffic movements and regulations about crossing the road in a place with which you are not familiar, so you should also be sensible in relation not only to earthquakes but also to fire.

What to expect when a major earthquake occurs

If a major earthquake (magnitude 6 or more) occurs, it is possible that the following might happen:

- There may be a very loud noise like a passing train;
- Buildings and the ground may shake violently for between 15 and 90 seconds, sometimes even longer;

- Weak building facades may collapse into the streets, glass windows and panels may shatter, roof tiles may fly off, chimneys may collapse, *etc.*;
- It may be hard to stand up, let alone walk due to the ground shaking; in severe cases the movement may be sufficient to throw you to the ground;
- Electricity, water and gas may fail or be switched off;
- Sprinkler systems and fire alarms may be triggered;
- Telephone systems (landlines and mobile) may shut down for significant periods after an earthquake;
- A tsunami may occur in coastal areas or in areas bordering large lakes. Take note of any tsunami warnings issued following an earthquake;
- Be prepared for aftershocks; these may be almost as strong as the main event, may start to occur within minutes of the main 'quake, and may occur for days to months after a strong earthquake.

What to do DURING a major earthquake

If indoors –

- Stay there; drop to the ground, **duck** under a sturdy desk or table to take **cover** or get into a corner of a room, NOT in a doorway, and **hold** onto whatever you are hiding beneath. Use the '**Duck, cover and hold**' actions. See the picture (*right*) for the best position.
- If you are in bed, stay there until the shaking has stopped.
- If in a high-rise building, stay away from windows and outside walls. Do not use lifts or staircases during the shaking.



If outdoors –

- Stay there; move into an open area away from trees, buildings, walls and power lines.

If in a vehicle –

- Stay in the vehicle until the shaking has stopped;
- Pull over to the side of the road and stop but away from buildings, overpasses, underpasses, trees and overhead cables, if possible.
- Only proceed, and with great caution, once the shaking has stopped but avoid bridges and structures that might have been damaged by the earthquake.

If in a crowded place –

- Crouch in the 'duck, cover and hold' posture and DO NOT rush for the nearest exit. Wait until the shaking has stopped then evacuate the building once you know the exit is clear.

If trapped under debris –

- Do not move about or kick up dust;
- Cover your mouth with a handkerchief or clothing;
- Do not light a match (in case of gas leaks);
- Use a whistle if you have one available. Tap on a pipe or wall so rescuers can locate you. Shout only as a last resort. Shouting can cause you to inhale dangerous amounts of dust.

What to do immediately AFTER a major earthquake

Your options will be dictated by your circumstances immediately after a major earthquake, the extent of damage to the local infrastructure and the level of preparedness of the authorities. The severity of damage and the number of fatalities and casualties can be worse in poorly-prepared countries than in those where precautions have been long established, even for a moderate earthquake. Be prepared for a general state of chaos and confusion and do not be surprised if telephones (landline and/or mobile) do not function for many hours after a major earthquake.

Assuming that there has been a significant amount of damage and disruption to local infrastructure, you are advised to seek advice from your nearest British Embassy or Consulate, which should have an Earthquake Contingency Plan. When they are able, they will provide assistance in communicating with your relations in the UK and will advise as to what they are able to provide in the way of further support. Do NOT assume that they will automatically provide you with food and shelter or emergency evacuation. In the most severe disasters, it may take several days to provide assistance. Furthermore, you may be a long way away from the nearest embassy/consulate making it impractical to try to reach the embassy/consulate in person.

You should check your insurance policy before you travel to ensure that you are aware of what support is available in the event of a natural disaster and what you should do and who you should contact should such an event occur.

Reynolds International Ltd (RIL) can provide training courses in earthquake preparedness to help you reduce your own vulnerability to becoming a casualty should a major earthquake occur where you are. We can also help you to develop your own Earthquake Emergency Response Plan (EERP). Please contact us for further details (email: info@reynolds-international.co.uk; tel: +44-(0)1352 756196).