

IS TRAVELING TO EUROPE DANGEROUS?



At the end of May, just in time for the peak summer season, the US State Department issued a security alert to travelers that are heading to Europe over the summer for city breaks or to attend big events, like the European Soccer Championship in France.

Traveling to Europe is described as a security risk by the authorities. The European Tourism Association (ETOA) has since responded, putting the validity and purpose of the alert into question.

Should travelers be worried about traveling to Europe? There are terms and phrases in the alert that will cause a great deal of concern for many prospective travelers. Any mention of “terror” or “terrorism” is sure to rile people up and this is seen here.

ETOA pointed out that the State Department is too quick to highlight the potential risk to tourists when no clear threat is apparent, calling it “unfocused concern”. The additional note in the media about potential Paris and Brussels attackers being at large somewhere in Europe doesn't help.

It is important to remember that there is no change of status attached to this “alert”, and that it shouldn't be seen as a “warning” against traveling to Europe. The problem with this terminology is that the public is not always sure what the difference is and all the talk of the security related disruption and greater terrorist targets is sure to put travelers on edge.

The alternative way of viewing this announcement is as a simple reissue of the alert that came through after the Brussels attacks. The government merely want travelers to be more vigilant of potentially dangerous situations if they do travel, rather than avoid traveling at all.

In addition to pointing out the flaws in the reissue of this alert, the ETOA is keen to highlight the safety record of Europe. The attacks in Paris and Brussels may still be fresh in the minds of many tourists, but European countries make up 18 of the top 20 safest countries in the world. There is a concern that by sparking fear about a potentially well-managed, secure event in France, the European Soccer Championship, the state department is actually aiding terrorists.

What has sparked this confusing “alert” that could cause so much concern? Again, there are different ways of looking at the reasoning behind this reissue. The State Department has pointed out two major European events that they feel will be potential targets due to their location and the number of people attending - the French European Football Championship and World Youth Day in Poland.

Alternatively, it could simply be about the basic rise in traveler numbers as the summer months begin. **They say that European cities have commercial centers and transport links that could be vulnerable, which is rather vague, and simply appear to be finding reasons to reissue this alert for the summer.** It is also telling that the alert will expire on August 31st.

Essentially, this is a seasonal alert that says very little while potentially causing a lot of concern about traveling to Europe. It is important to remember that the State Department says they have no knowledge of any “specific, credible terrorist event around these events or in any particular place in Europe”.

Travelers should not change their plans, avoid these key events or worry that an “alert” is a serious

“warning” - although the government could learn to make the latter a little easier for people.

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