

TOP HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS

For The Retiree In Europe

By the Editors of Live and Invest Overseas[™]

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Introduction

Health insurance to cover you in your new country of residence is one of the most important issues you must address as you plan for your move overseas. Bottom line, you have three options: an international policy, a local policy, or no policy at all.

The third option can be more reasonable than it may seem, depending on where you plan to live. In some countries, medical care is so affordable that it can make sense to pay for it as you need it, rather than insuring against it.

Most people, though, most places in the world, feel more comfortable knowing that they're covered in case of medical emergency or, certainly, calamity. One of the main advantages of an international health insurance policy is that it can cover you under all

circumstances anywhere in the world, making it a good option if you intend to travel regularly beyond your chosen overseas base.

An international policy also can be a good option if you intend to divide your time between your chosen overseas haven and the United States. However, an international health insurance policy has an important downside: It's more expensive than a local one. Local medical insurance can cost less than US\$100 a month—in some countries less than US\$50 a month.

It's important, though, that you understand what you're buying. Policy options, details of coverage, deductibles, and premium costs vary dramatically country to country. Seek out expert advice with Live and Invest Overseas' top health insurance advisor [here](#).

Our goal in preparing this report is to make it as straightforward as possible for you to compare your options one country to another. By understanding how the public system works (and if you should rely on it), how good the private facilities are, and knowing what you can take advantage of as a foreign resident, you can better prepare yourself to know what level of insurance policy you'll need.

Additionally, we provide you with key information on emergency medical services and the possibilities for in-home nursing care, retirement communities, and assisted-living facilities, so you can plan ahead for any eventuality.

We've discovered that, even with our in-country resources and contacts, this is not easily accomplished. It's no simple thing to compile consistent data...

Some countries offer a dozen or more local insurance options. Some offer a handful. The information available on the internet in nearly every case is incomplete or out-of-date.

This confusion can be compounded by language. That is, the people on the other end of your conversation may or may not speak English.

In these pages, we arm you with information to make at least a preliminary determination as to which option might make sense for you. In countries where many options are available, we detail for you here the top ones that we've identified based on our own research and the recommendations of in-country contacts and correspondents. In other words, the particular policies we walk you through country by country have not been randomly chosen. We believe these are the best options for different reasons in each case.

Note that local insurance providers accept new policyholders only through a certain age that is typically younger than the cut-off age for an international policy. In other words, depending on the country and your age, a local policy may not be an option. You may have no choice but to invest in a (more expensive) international policy if you want formal health coverage.

Once insured, however, some companies allow you to renew your policy until a certain age, others offer lifetime coverage. You will have to read the policy documents very carefully in each case.

Before we dive into the per-country specifics, there are a few things we want to explain as a preface...



Insurance On Arrival

Most countries require those seeking residency to be covered by insurance as soon as they arrive in the country. But, in an infuriating catch-22, you often have to be a resident in a country before you can contract with a local insurer.

Don't let this force you into buying an international policy, though, unless you're really sure that's what you want.

So this puts you at a short-term disadvantage: How can you know the best policy for you before you even land? On the face of it, this means you doing all your research and contracting whichever policy you choose before you set off for your new home... But what if you get there and realize it's not what you need?

Travel insurance is the easy solution here. However, many countries also make it easy by offering a cheap and basic plan that you can buy into to satisfy the authorities, then switch to something else once you're settled. In any case where this is possible, we've alerted you to the local option.

The point is, though, that you shouldn't feel like you have no choice but to go local because of this requirement. If it makes you more comfortable, get a short-term travel plan from a company you're familiar with back home, and deal with long-term insurance—be it local, international, travel, or none at all—after the dust has settled.

Because you're planning to establish your home in the EU, there's one more thing to consider... You must be certain that the medical coverage you use or buy for this interim period complies with Schengen requirements, which state that you must have "adequate and valid medical insurance to cover any expenses which might arise in connection with repatriation for medical reasons, urgent medical attention and/or emergency hospital treatment or death, during their stay(s) on the territory of the Member States.

"The insurance must be valid throughout the territory of the Member States and cover the entire period of the person's intended stay or transit. The minimum coverage shall be EUR 30,000."

Ask your current insurer if your coverage complies with the Schengen requirements or can be converted to one that does; if not, you might want to cancel your current insurance and buy travel or private coverage that does comply.

Comparing Care

Again, the purpose of this report is to allow you to compare the overall care and the various systems in place in our top seven European havens. With that in mind, we've provided rankings where they exist.

The foremost authority on the subject on global health care is the World Health Organization (WHO), which put out a World Health Report that has come to be the primary reference source for contrasting health systems worldwide.

Of the havens covered in this report, all seven appear in the top 30 best-ranked health care systems in the world...

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 France | 11 Norway | 21 Belgium |
| 2 Italy | 12 Portugal | 22 Colombia |
| 3 San Marino | 13 Monaco | 23 Sweden |
| 4 Andorra | 14 Greece | 24 Cyprus |
| 5 Malta | 15 Iceland | 25 Germany |
| 6 Singapore | 16 Luxembourg | 26 Saudi Arabia |
| 7 Spain | 17 Netherlands | 27 UAE |
| 8 Oman | 18 U.K. | 28 Israel |
| 9 Austria | 19 Ireland | 29 Morocco |
| 10 Japan | 20 Switzerland | 30 Canada |

The Joint Commission International (JCI) is a good resource as well, providing accreditation for hospitals, ambulatory care facilities, clinical laboratories, home care, long-term care, medical transport organizations, and primary care services, as well as certification for disease or condition-specific care.

JCI accreditation is considered the gold standard in global health care, and JCI consultants are the most skilled and experienced in the industry. In each case, we've listed out the JCI-accredited per country, but we haven't indicated which parts of their services are accredited.

The JCI website provides easy-to-browse lists of all accredited facilities in the world, with full details of accreditation history; check for details on your country's facilities [here](#).

Another good resource is Medical Travel Quality Alliance (MTQUA), an independent international organization established in 2009 that advocates for medical tourists by assessing various medical providers, providing accreditations (check the list of MTQUA-accredited facilities list [here](#)) and ranking the top 10 facilities in the world for medical tourism each year. You can be confident that an MTQUA-accredited facility is one you'd be comfortable receiving care in.

Yet another specialist in this field is the [Medical Tourism Association \(MTA\)](#), a global non-profit group that aims to provide as much information to prospective medical tourists as they can. Again, if they recommend a facility as being appropriate for medical tourists, you can rest easy that its standards would meet your own.

And comparing against quality and cost against the United States? There's no good singular resource, but between a few sources, you can give yourself a pretty good picture of the situation...

A study by the University of Michigan reports that "even people with health insurance pay, on average, more than \$1,000 out of their pockets for a hospital stay." This, simply from co-pays and deductibles required.

From 2009 to 2013, total cost sharing associated with hospitalizations grew by more than 37%, from \$738 to \$1,013," Emily Adrion wrote in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), which compiled the information from 7.3 million patients covered by Aetna, UnitedHealthcare, and Humana from 2009 2013.

Plus, a 2015 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation also found that insurance premiums rose 4% from

2014 to 2015 (and have only gone up since). So while your out-of-pocket obligation rises, so does your flat insurance cost—even if you're healthy and not actually seeking care and paying co-pays for treatment.

The American Journal of Medicine put out a study in 2009 that reported almost two-thirds of bankruptcies in the United States were caused by a medical situation—even though roughly 78% of the bankruptees had insurance at the start of the illness. Of those bankrupted, uninsured families were said to have owed nearly US\$27,000; those with private insurance owed over US\$17,000. The most unfortunate of these started with insurance but ended up losing it during the course of their health debacle—those wound up owing about US\$22,000.

The most devastating of their bills were to the hospital, the next highest came from prescriptions, followed by doctor fees and insurance premiums.

In fact, though, JAMA's US\$1,013 number is conservative when you look at the by-state averages of an overnight hospital stay, which give a countrywide average of US\$2,346 per night in nonprofit hospitals; US\$1,798 a night in for-profit hospitals; and US\$1,974 per night in state or government hospitals. (Information provided by Becker's Hospital Review.)

Remember, those are the costs of simply staying overnight in the hospital... they don't include any doctor's fees, tests, drugs, or equipment used by the patient. The situation is so desperate, that the majority of Americans with significant medical bills are crowdfunding to try to get them paid.

Save yourself all this worry and hassle, and simply head overseas for care.

General Tips

How To Find Referrals

The best place to get referrals is from your fellow expats and new local friends. Ask around among your new compatriots (be they foreign or local) for whatever it is you need (medical or otherwise), and you're likely to get a great list of top providers... and likely a list of those not to use—equally valuable!

You can also consult your embassy's local website. The U.S. Embassy lists all of their official branches [here](#).

Once you find your local embassy website, search it for lists of referrals. These almost always include recommended physicians, specialists, and

dentists, but often also lists of attorneys and other professionals that you may need. In all cases the recommendations will speak English fluently and will have studied or practiced in the United States at some point.

In a well-developed town or city, you might see lots of clinics, dental offices, and specialists' offices on the streets, but you're running a risk if you walk in without doing any due diligence. And you certainly can't expect great results on major or complex treatments by stumbling into the first office you see. You wouldn't do that in the United States, and you shouldn't do it anywhere else.

Check With The CDC

For each country, we've indicated which vaccinations the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend for the region. [Check the CDC website](#) for the most up-to-date advice on diseases and preventions, to check which vaccines are recommended for which country, and/or to request a more personalized recommendation tailored to your personal situation.

EMS Overseas

If you have to call for emergency medical assistance overseas, you can't be sure the operator will speak English. (Wherever there is a tourist or English-speaking hotline available, we've included those details.) With that in mind, you might ask a friend or neighbor to make the call for you if possible.

In any case, it's a good idea to get comfortable saying a few important things in your new local language, including:

- Who you are;
- Your phone number;

- Your address and location (know how to describe where you live by landmarks);
- The medical situation (get familiar with any terms you might need to know; for example, if you've got a heart condition, learn the associated vocabulary ahead of time);
- Where you are if you're not at home (basic directions, location names, and landmark

references—you'd learn all these in the first weeks of any language-learning program, so pay attention in those classes).

In Europe, note that the number 112 is the universal medical emergency number to call; it can be dialed for free from any phone.

Prescriptions Overseas

The first thing to understand about drugs is that the United States grossly overregulates and overcharges. Prescription drug regulations are much looser outside the United States. Many medications are easier to acquire overseas (antibiotics and drugs used to treat mental illnesses, for example), and prescriptions are not required in many situations.

Antibiotics, cough meds, diuretics, and your typical cold medicines can certainly be bought over the counter. You just have to know the name in the language of your new country. Take an old prescription container or an information leaflet to explain to the pharmacist what you're looking for.

While medications are almost universally available, they may not be called what they were back home, often known by their scientific name instead of a brand name. Make sure you know this name before you head to the pharmacy, as it's likely to be the only way to find what you need... plus having the correct chemical name is the only way to make sure you have the same stuff. It's also a good idea to bring in your old prescription bottle, package, or the instruction leaflet so that you can demonstrate to the pharmacist what you're looking for.

Working with pharmacists outside of the United States is often more of a dialogue than a set of instructions, so talk to your local pharmacist, they're usually eager to help. Often, they can look up what you've got based

on the documentation you provide and either have it or suggest a generic or alternative.

For example, serial expat Kat K. shares "My birth control in the States cost me US\$89 a month in co-pay. When I moved to Panama (without insurance) I went to the pharmacy with the brand name and scientific name to ask if they had it, and they handed me a box for US\$26... that's the entire cost, not a co-pay. It has a different name than back in the States, but it's the exact same packaging otherwise."

Again, because things are generally less regulated outside the States, pharmacists play a bigger role overseas than they do back home. Instead of heading to the doctor or clinic with a minor complaint, you can bypass a checkup and head straight to the pharmacy. Describe your symptoms, and the pharmacist will give you what you need (including antibiotics). Know what you need already? Simply head in and tell them what you want.

If you're moving overseas, you'll want to come with at least a small supply of any medications you're currently on. If that's the case, make sure you keep your meds in their original packaging and carry a copy of the original prescription, along with the chemical name and dosage. Some countries are strict on the movement of drugs across borders, and you may find you need to show these things at customs (though it's not typical for most countries). Plus, if you end up

in an emergency or need more, you're as prepared as you can be.

If you can't find what you need locally (or it's overpriced), you can always order online. We recommend Expatriate Prescription Services (EPS),

an international prescription benefit mail order program headquartered in the United States. "Our clients experience a savings average of 25% to 30% in comparison to average U.S. prices," says Managing Director Virginia Clark.

Your Medical Records Overseas

All files and records pertaining to your health belong to you. This may seem like an obvious statement... but have you ever tried to get a copy of your file from your doctor in the States? It's like you're performing your own record-ectomy. You won't have that problem overseas. Just ask for a copy of any paperwork and it's yours to do with as you please.

Nursing Homes And Assisted Living Overseas

North America is by far the most developed part of the world when it comes to elderly care facilities. This difference is cultural and deeply engrained in local traditions. For much of the rest of the world, aging or ill family members are cared for within the family unit. This care isn't outsourced the way it so regularly is in the United States.

Terminologies

Finally, a note on translations... In British English, plans and organized structures are often called schemes. Because U.K. English is the default translation in Europe, many countries offer what are translated as various health schemes, insurance schemes, and social security schemes.

As an American, that word might give you pause, but don't let it. There's nothing underhanded or malicious in the word; no dastardly plot to separate you and your money. "Scheme" in this sense merely refers to the system of organization applied.

With all that said, read on...

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