

# DEATH AWAY FROM HOME

## DEATH IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

### • Local burial

This is often the least expensive option; however, a few countries do not allow the burial of foreigners. The Consular Officer will be able to tell you.

### • Cremation

Available in most countries, it may be prohibited or limited in predominantly Catholic or Muslim countries. Some countries have few crematories which might increase cost and delay the return of the ashes. However, compared to the high cost of transporting a body, cremated remains can be returned home inexpensively. You can mail them, or take them on an airplane at no cost—as carry-on (in a container that can be x-rayed) or packed in luggage.

### • Body donation

There is an urgent need for body donors in many countries. The Consular Officer should be able to assist with arrangements.

### • Returning the body to the US

Preparation and shipment are according to local laws, regulations, and customs. Embalming is not widely practiced in most foreign countries, though there are other methods of preparation for shipment, some of which will preclude viewing (such as chemically saturated shrouds). Charges for these services are high and vary widely from one location to another. After receipt of the necessary funds, there may be a 3 to 10-day interval until actual shipment. You will need to notify a funeral director in the US who can assist with arrangements.

## DEATH IN THE US

### • Cremation

If death occurs away from home and there is no need for a viewing or funeral service prior to cremation, it is usually easy to locate an affordable cremation at the place of death. After cremation, the ashes can then be carried or mailed home.

Search online for “cremation” and the state name. Compare prices, making sure that you confirm that the price is all-inclusive, including the crematory and permit fees.

Funeral Consumers Alliance members are entitled to any discount offered by the local affiliate. If there is no local affiliate or if the deceased is not a member, call the FCA office at 802-865-8300. We have names of trustworthy providers in many areas of the country.

### • Preparing the body for burial

If there is no need for a viewing or funeral service in the area where death occurred, you will generally save money by working through a funeral director located where the body is headed (home), not at the place of death. Call funeral homes in your home state and ask the price of **Receiving Remains** (one of the FTC-required options offered by all funeral homes). This usually includes picking up the body at the airport, filing permits and the death certificate, and transportation to the cemetery; it might be as low as \$500 but can be \$3,000 or more.

If the body has already been taken to a funeral home at the place of death, ask about the price for **Forwarding Remains** (another FTC-required option offered by all funeral homes). The charge for this service can be anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000 or more. This will usually include pick-up of the body, embalming, and possibly a shipping container as well as transportation to the nearest airport. (The General Price List must indicate which items and services are included.) This price is often much less than the individual items priced separately, but is generally more than the charge for Receiving Remains.

**NOTE:** Whether purchasing the Forwarding Remains or Receiving Remains packages, the cost of the airline ticket is additional.

### • **Shipping the body**

Ask the funeral director to use a shipping service such as Inman Nationwide. As of 2015, Inman charges funeral homes \$925 to pick up a body anywhere in the contiguous US, get permits, the death certificate, embalm, and deliver to the airport. There may be an additional mileage charge if the Inman agent in your area must travel any great distance.

There are two kinds of Airtrays or shipping containers: one carries just the body, the other covers and protects a casket. The wholesale costs are about \$50 to \$75. If the funeral home is going to charge more than \$150 or so, you might ask if there is a used one that can be recycled for a reduced cost. Most funeral homes have a few in the garage, and it doesn't hurt to ask.

### • **Transporting the body yourself**

In most states, it's legal for family to transport the body. Even renting a van might be considerably less expensive than airfare, and such a journey can have some therapeutic value. Only three states (Alabama, Alaska, and New Jersey) require embalming when crossing state lines (and California, if public transport is used), although it's possible an exception would be made if the family were transporting the body. If you plan to transport a body yourself, please call the FCA office for advice.

### • **Buying a casket**

If there is a need to have viewing or a funeral service in the state where death occurred, you'll want a casket before the body is shipped to the other location. If not, purchase your casket from the receiving funeral director or from a third party vendor. In selecting a casket, specifically avoid a "sealer." An affordable casket would be a 20-gauge "non-protective" steel casket or a cloth-covered wood or fiberboard one.

### • **Making cemetery arrangements**

Cemetery charges and any funeral services will be extra. After getting a price for Receiving Remains from the funeral home in the state where the burial will occur, ask the cost of a Graveside Service (usually about \$150 to \$350) if relatives and friends will want to be in attendance.

It is also a good idea to call the cemetery directly to check on prices for opening and closing the grave and whether or not the cemetery sells the grave liner or vault it will probably require. It may cost less through the cemetery, but not always. There is no advantage in purchasing an expensive or sealed vault.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

### • **Bereavement airfares**

These airfares are largely a thing of the past, and generally weren't a good deal anyway. Your best bet for lower-priced seats is to check the variety of websites that offer discount airline fares.

### • **Authorizations**

Carry your Living Will, Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare, Advance Health Care Directive and Agent for Body Disposition forms with you when traveling. If cremation is planned, you should include a statement authorizing your own cremation. Although the forms may not carry full authority in the state or country in which illness or death occurs, they will give guidance to others as to your wishes.

### • **Body donation**

If you had planned to be a body donor, you may wish to amend your donor card to indicate "or nearest medical school". Otherwise, your estate may be slapped with a hefty fee to transport your body to the school in which you first enrolled.

<https://funerals.org/?consumers=death-away-home>

## **Additional Information on Death Abroad**

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/while-abroad/death-abroad1.html>

**When an U.S. citizen dies abroad, the Bureau of Consular Affairs assists the family and friends.** The Bureau of Consular Affairs attempts to locate and inform the next-of-kin of the U.S. citizen's death. The Bureau of Consular Affairs provides information on how to make arrangements for local burial or return of the remains to the United States. The disposition of remains is subject to U.S. and local (foreign) law, U.S. and foreign customs requirements, and the foreign country facilities, which are often vastly different from those in the United States.

The Department of State has no funds to assist in the return of remains or ashes of U.S. citizens who die abroad. The Bureau of Consular Affairs assists the next-of-kin to convey instructions to the appropriate offices within the foreign country, and provides information to the family on how to transmit the necessary private funds to cover the costs overseas. Upon issuance of a local (foreign) death certificate, the nearest embassy or consulate may prepare a Consular Report of the Death of an American Abroad. Copies of that report are provided to the next-of-kin or legal representative and may be used in U.S. courts to settle estate matters.

A U.S. consular officer overseas has statutory responsibility for the personal estate of a U.S. citizen who dies abroad if the deceased has no legal representative or next-of-kin in the country where the death occurred, subject to local law. In that situation, the consular officer takes possession of personal effects, such as jewelry, personal documents and papers, and clothing.

The consular officer prepares an inventory of the personal effects and then carries out instructions from the legal representative or next-of-kin concerning the effects. For more information on the Consular Report of the Death of an American Abroad, and other services that a consular officer can help you with when a loved one passes away overseas, see the links below.

## **Return of Remains of Deceased U.S. Citizens**

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/while-abroad/death-abroad1/return-of-remains-of-deceased-us-citizen.html>

When a U.S. citizen dies abroad, U.S. consular officers assist families in making arrangements with local authorities for preparation and disposition of the remains. Options available to a family depend upon local law and practice in the foreign country. U.S. and foreign law require the following documents before remains can be sent from one country to another: Consular mortuary certificate, affidavit of local funeral director, and transit permit. Additional documents may be required depending on the circumstances of the death. The consular officer will ensure that all required documents accompany the remains to the United States.

## Estates of Deceased U.S. Citizens

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/while-abroad/death-abroad1/estates-of-deceased-US-citizens.html>

**Notification of Next of Kin:** When a U.S. citizen dies abroad, a U.S. consular officer usually notify the decedent's next of kin by telephone. The consular officer arranges for the disposition of the remains and the deceased's belongings or personal estate based on instructions from the legal representative or other qualified party.

### **A legal representative for these purposes may be:**

- (1) an executor appointed in intestate proceedings;
- (2) an administrator appointed in intestate proceedings;
- (3) an agent of the executor or administrator, qualifying by power of attorney;
- (4) a surviving spouse;
- (5) a child of legal age;
- (6) a parent;
- (7) a sibling; or
- (8) next of kin.

If no legal representative is in country, a consular officer will act as a **provisional conservator** of the deceased's personal effects.

Consular officers will usually take possession of:

- jewelry
- convertible assets such as money
- Luggage
- clothes
- personal documents

As provisional conservator, the consular officer may take possession of, inventory, and appraise personal effects. Consular officers may also pay local debts (such as hospital and hotel bills) from funds available in the estate or from funds received from the legal representative, and may assist to deliver effects to the person entitled to receive them. The U.S. government has no independent authority to

- withdraw funds from a bank or cash travelers' checks
- incur expenses to have the items shipped or safeguarded
- take possession of large, bulky items

**Entitlement to Receive Personal Estate:** A U.S. or host country court must decide who is entitled to receive a particular estate if there is a conflict or question over ownership. If the value of a personal estate is small, an [affidavit of surviving spouse or next of kin](#) is often sufficient to allow the consular officer to release the estate.

**Shipment of Personal Effects:** After the personal effects are inventoried and proof of entitlement is provided, the consular officer may assist with returning the effects to the United States if the claimant wishes.

**Questions:** For additional information, you may contact a U.S. Embassy or Consulate or the Office of American Citizens Services at (888) 407-4747.