

# Risky business

As growth in emerging markets takes travellers to less developed places, **Rose Dykins** asks what assistance is available to help you stay safe



## FEEL THE HEAT

I attended Pilgrims Group's two-day HEAT (hostile environment awareness training) course, which puts groups of six to 12 participants, mainly journalists and businesspeople who need to travel to hostile or high-risk environments, through their paces.

Pilgrims' team of highly qualified instructors – many of them ex-special forces, all of them medical instructors – deliver theory-based and practical training. "Participants will gain a good level of trauma first aid skills, life-saving scenario-based training, and a bit of a slap in the face from the realisation that safety should be at the top of their agenda," says Sam Mostyn, Pilgrims' training manager.

He's not exaggerating the hard-hitting nature of the course. One minute you'll be in the classroom rehearsing a first aid technique or an informative acronym, when all of a sudden you'll hear what sounds like a gun shot, and before you know it, a new scenario has begun and you're dragging a man across the floor with a realistic gash across his shin as he bellows in pain.

"You're put in situations that are way out of your comfort zone and that overflow your senses – certain parts of the course were so intense," says one of the participants. "You're theoretically prepared, but you don't know what's coming next."

The scenarios imitate the threats posed to business travellers in high-risk areas. I won't go into specific details, but suffice to say there was fake blood, blank weapons, explosive simulations and some very convincing acting from the instructors and hired actors, who don't break character – although there is a "get-out phrase" if you feel you need to stop.

Many of the scenarios make use of Pilgrims' countryside location in Surrey (30 minutes from London by train) and we frequently piled into Land Rovers to drive to outdoor areas – with, invariably, another surprise along the way. You find yourself getting immersed in the situations, desperately wanting to do the right thing. Your brain flashes back to what you've been taught in the classroom, but often panic takes over, and you act instinctively – or freeze completely.

"This is why we physically make you go through these procedures," an instructor says. "The idea is to hardwire them into your brain to better prepare you for the real thing."

One participant said: "The mix of theory and the practical application was wonderful. The course has opened my eyes to the importance of being aware of your surroundings – of looking around your hotel room or wherever and thinking of how you could escape if you had to. The conflict management is something I can apply anywhere, whether it's someone shoving me in a bar or mugging me on the street, and I've learnt first aid skills I could definitely use.

"Now, if I stood in front of a casualty after a gunfire, I'm still not sure how I would react. But at least I won't stand there not knowing what to do." *Rose Dykins*

■ **The HEAT course costs £1,675, which includes training material but excludes overnight accommodation. The next course is on July 4-5. Visit [pilgrimsgroup.com](http://pilgrimsgroup.com)**



A gentleman in Shanghai for work goes out for drinks one evening. He meets some ladies, and buys them drinks. They take him off to a karaoke bar, where he buys them another round of drinks, only this time he gets a bill for US\$1,500. He then gets beaten up in the toilets, and is told that if he doesn't cough up another US\$2,000, he'll be in trouble. Some of his belongings are taken and

he's thrown into a taxi, where his attacker speaks to the driver in Chinese. He's scared, and has no idea where he's being taken."

## Having security specialists at hand can be indispensable

Carla Potok, a French and British litigator who specialises in corporate travel, is describing a real-life incident. "Luckily, he had security

services he was able to call," she says. "He was put into contact with somebody who spoke Chinese from the organisation. They were able to speak to the taxi driver and ensure that he was driven to his hotel."

Having security specialists at hand when you travel can be indispensable. While some global companies may have an in-house security team, others enlist the help of external organisations such as Pilgrims Group ([pilgrimsgroup.com](http://pilgrimsgroup.com)),

Control Risks ([control-risks.com](http://control-risks.com)) and iJet ([ijet.com](http://ijet.com)). Corporations, SMEs and individuals can all call upon these organisations, which offer services such as pre-trip planning and consultancy, ground assistance, extraction from life-threatening situations, and employee training.

Enlisting such services is set to become even more important as new markets emerge and business travellers are sent to corners of the globe they're less acquainted with.

"Following the global mobility of business travellers to the BRIC countries [Brazil, Russia, India and China], they will progressively be sent to emerging markets in the 'bottom 60' countries, which include Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the political climate, security and medical infrastructure differ from those in the BRIC countries," says Lisbeth Claus, professor of global human resources at Willamette University in the US.

Events from the past year indicate how rapidly countries with fragile political states can descend into chaos. The Arab Spring, in particular, has caused companies to reassess the security and safety procedures they provide for employees.

Damian Taylor, regional security director at Control Risks, says: "Previously, a lot of companies would have had travel policies tucked away somewhere in HR that nobody really

## CASE STUDY: AFRICA

Matthias Hartmann is regional sales manager for a catering equipment company. He will soon be doing business throughout Africa (see our special report on West Africa, page 50), and recently participated in Pilgrims Group's HEAT course.

"My region was previously 15 countries in Western Europe, and now my area of responsibility has changed to sub-Saharan Africa and the Gulf. From September, I will be living in Cape Town but will be constantly going between countries – from Angola to Tanzania, from Kenya to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"I will depend on a driver, so I'm wary that I'll be relying heavily on local expertise. The traffic in Nairobi is terrible – you can't move in any direction, which puts you in a vulnerable position. Or getting stuck in a crowd in Lagos – if people turn angry and target Westerners, my white face will make me stand out. Kidnapping is another potential risk.

"My company increased my insurance coverage, so it now covers specialist things such as being taken hostage. They sent me on the Pilgrims course and have made it clear that when I'm working in Africa, if I don't feel comfortable doing something or going somewhere, I shouldn't, even if it's bad for business. It was reassuring to know that if a situation escalates overnight, such as a revolution, and I need to get out of the country, that I can just go, with no expense spared.

"Doing business in so many new countries will be a learning curve. My first time in Lagos, at passport control, we were all asked to put our passports into a shopping bag and they took the bag away. I had somebody waiting for me on the other side, there was nowhere to buy water, no air conditioning, and I didn't know what was happening. Three hours later, they finally came back with the bag and said, 'Off you go, here's your passport.'

"Next time this happens, I'll be prepared and I won't feel so stressed because I'll know this is just the way it goes. It's about knowing what's normal in that country."



about the range of ground services they could provide – and the price tag.

"It would cost a few thousand euros for us to fly over and take care of a missing passport while you carried on with your business," he says. "The most expensive service we offer is probably the exclusive hire of a B747. Prices vary depending on the destination, but

**'You have to follow the plan that your company has put in place'**

typically our services range from €10,000 to €300,000."

Is there anything they can't do? "We can't do the impossible," he says. "Part of our service is to analyse the risks, threats and vulnerabilities of a situation and inform our clients. It's up to us to construct a bubble around you – but we will let you know if that bubble is not 100 per cent secure."

adhered to – that's if they had any at all. They're realising that everything starts with that policy, and it's part of their duty of care. Companies are buying services from security organisations more and more – for our travel security awareness training the figures have more than doubled compared with pre-Arab Spring."

Not only are companies becoming more proactive but security organisations are also adapting their services to changing times: "In light

**'In light of the Arab Spring, we have focused more on self-defence'**

of the Arab Spring, we have focused more on self-defence in our HEAT course for business travellers [see panel, previous page], including how to avoid getting grabbed and abducted," says Sam Mostyn, training manager at Pilgrims Group.

"We were doing self-defence before, but because people's minds are now more focused on situations such as what happened to Lara Logan [the CBS correspondent who was sexually assaulted during

demonstrations in Cairo last year], our training focuses more heavily on conflict management and operating in a riot situation."

US-based security organisation iJet was recently appointed to provide services for clients of travel management company Carlson Wagonlit. "If you look at most of our investment now, it's in mobile apps," says Steve Hoffman, chief executive of iJet. "These include specific information about a business trip, easy access to

rebooking [travel or accommodation], destination intelligence and up-to-date expert information to help the employee assess their situation at a moment's notice."

Still, security companies are aware that there are times when your phone will become useless, or separated from you, and that's when they employ human assistance. I asked the security director of luxury travel concierge service Kronos (kronosmembers.com), who goes by the alias "Mr Cavalier",

As new and unfamiliar threats emerge, even if your company does their best to keep you safe, there is only so much they can do before it comes down to you. So how can you make sure you've done all you can to be prepared? "Employees can put pressure on employers, push through their unions and get them to put in place security measures, to outsource a security organisation and to have someone in the company to inform travellers of the risks," Potok says.

Claus agrees that it's important for both the employer and employee to accept responsibility when it comes to duty of care. "What's good for the employer is good for the employee," she says. "You have to follow the plan that your company has put in place – if there are policies that limit your behaviour, or if you're required to wear a tracking device, then you have to play the game, too." ■



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Bridges Wharf, Battersea, London, SW11 3BE

T: 44 (0) 20 7801 3500

E: [reservations@hotelverta.co.uk](mailto:reservations@hotelverta.co.uk)

[www.hotelverta.com](http://www.hotelverta.com)

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