



Building a Country Risk Picture That Reflects Your Itinerary

A practical guide for assessing travel risk at the level of the journey, not just the country.

A country risk rating is useful. It can flag political instability, crime, terrorism, health concerns, or weak infrastructure. What it can't do is tell an organisation everything it needs to know about a specific journey.

Two employees can travel to the same country and face very different risks. One flies into the capital, stays in an international hotel, and attends meetings nearby. The other travels by road to a remote industrial site, works late, and returns through areas with limited communications or medical support. The country is the same. The risk picture isn't.

The Policy Illusion: the false sense of coverage that comes from attaching a single country rating to a journey, as if the rating itself were the assessment. It gives the organisation a colour on a map and the traveller very little else.

1. Begin With the Actual Journey

A meaningful assessment starts with the itinerary, not the destination. Map each of the following before assessing risk:

- Departure airport and transit points
- Arrival time
- Accommodation
- Meeting venues
- Transport routes
- Any travel outside the main city

Each stage can introduce its own concerns — a stable destination with an unstable road from the airport, a reputable hotel next to a protest site, a transit connection through a country with its own visa or security requirements. Follow the traveller from departure to return, not just to the destination's border.

2. Break the Journey Into Locations

Country-level information is usually too broad to act on. Risk varies between regions, cities, and neighbourhoods:

- Border areas — conflict or smuggling
- Tourist districts — higher theft rates
- Government areas — prone to demonstrations
- Remote locations — weak emergency services

A useful risk picture identifies the specific places the traveller will actually be, and the conditions likely to affect them there. This doesn't require a lengthy intelligence report — just enough detail to support a sensible decision.

3. Consider the Timing

The same itinerary can carry different risks depending on when it happens:

- Elections, festivals, sporting events, political anniversaries, public holidays
- Seasonal conditions — rainfall, extreme heat, wildfire season, severe winter weather
- Arrival time — a journey routine in daylight may be poor timing late at night

Timing isn't an administrative detail. It's part of the risk assessment.

4. Examine the Purpose of Travel

What the traveller is actually doing changes their exposure. Consider whether the assignment involves:

- Office meetings vs. site visits, audits, or stakeholder interviews
- Carrying valuable equipment
- Activity that could draw attention or carry legal/cultural sensitivity

Assess what the employee will be doing, who they'll meet, and whether the work could be misread or opposed locally — questions a generic destination report can't answer.

5. Understand the Traveller

Risk is also shaped by the person travelling:

- Experience with the destination
- Nationality, gender, health, language ability
- Visibility of their corporate role

A first-time traveller may need more preparation than a regular visitor; someone carrying medication may need advice on import restrictions and local healthcare. This isn't an excuse for unnecessary personal intrusion — it's recognising that people experience the same destination differently.

6. Test the Practical Arrangements

Check whether the arrangements actually suit the conditions:

- Hotel location, security standard, and reliable access
- Transport from a known, vetted supplier
- Road travel scheduled in daylight where possible
- Communications, access to money, local medical facilities, alternative routes

These details often decide whether a manageable incident stays manageable.

7. Look Beyond a Single Source

Government advisories are a useful foundation but shouldn't stand alone. Cross-check against:

- Local news and weather information
- Health guidance and transport updates
- Security reporting

- Contacts on the ground

Compare sources rather than simply collecting them. The goal isn't to gather as much information as possible — it's to identify what's relevant to this itinerary.

8. Identify the Decisions Required

A risk picture should lead to action. Depending on findings, this may mean:

- Confirming the trip can proceed as planned
- Changing the hotel or restricting road movement
- Adding a briefing, driver, or check-in procedure
- Closer monitoring, postponement, or cancellation in serious cases

State it plainly: what controls are needed, who owns them, and what change would trigger a review. Without that, the document is a description of risk rather than a way of managing it — the Policy Illusion in written form.

9. Keep the Picture Current

Conditions shift between approval and departure — unrest can develop, weather can deteriorate, an airline can change its schedule.

- Review the assessment again shortly before travel
- Monitor while the traveller is away, particularly where conditions are unstable

A country risk picture isn't a permanent judgement. It's a working assessment tied to a specific traveller, itinerary, and period.

Quick Reference Checklist

Use this before approving any journey:

- ☐ Itinerary mapped stage by stage, departure to return
- ☐ Risk identified at the level of specific locations, not just the country
- ☐ Timing factors considered (events, season, arrival time)
- ☐ Purpose of travel and traveller profile assessed
- ☐ Accommodation, transport, and communications tested against conditions
- ☐ Multiple sources cross-checked, not just one advisory
- ☐ Required controls, owners, and review triggers documented
- ☐ Review scheduled shortly before departure and during travel

From Country Information to Travel Decisions

Effective travel risk management is more than attaching a colour rating to a country. It means understanding where the traveller is going, what they'll be doing, how they'll move, and what support is available if circumstances change.

ISO 31030 encourages exactly this journey-specific approach — moving organisations from broad country information to practical, proportionate travel arrangements.

Initiative Training Group helps organisations move past the Policy Illusion and build destination risk assessments that reflect real itineraries rather than generic assumptions.

Because the destination may be written as a single country on the booking. The journey rarely is.

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