

OTAS BRIEF • TB-001

Working in the Middle East: a travel safety briefing for event professionals

Operational

Tactical

Strategic

By OTAS Insights · Published by OTAS Live Ltd

Correct as of 20 October 2026

Read this first. This briefing is general information for event professionals. It is not legal, insurance, medical or security advice, and it is not a threat assessment. It does not replace your employer's or the client's own risk assessment, your insurer's policy wording or current FCDO travel advice. FCDO advice can change quickly, so check the FCDO page for every country on your route before you travel and while you are away. Get your own professional advice for your circumstances.

The region is a major market for event operations. Right now, advice from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) for many Middle East countries warns of regional tensions, possible attacks, flight cancellations and airspace that can close at short notice [5] to [18]. This briefing covers what to sort before you go, what to watch on the ground, what to do when things change and how to look after yourself when you get home. Unless another source is cited, country points come from FCDO travel advice.

1. Before you go

Check FCDO advice, then keep checking

Read the FCDO page for every country you will enter or transit, including entry requirements, safety, local laws and health [1]. Sign up for FCDO email alerts [2][3]. Re-check **when you book, 72 hours before departure, on the day you travel** and whenever an alert arrives.

Insurance that actually covers the trip

Buy travel insurance as soon as you book. Gov.uk warns that travelling where FCDO advises against all travel or all but essential travel may invalidate your cover, and that many policies exclude these destinations [4]. Check that your cover, personal or your employer's:

- names every work **and** transit country, for the full trip [4]
- covers medical treatment, emergency transport and repatriation [4]
- covers the work you will do, paid or unpaid. A holiday policy may not, so check the wording or get business travel cover [4][6]
- says what happens if FCDO advice changes after you book or while you are there. Get your insurer's answer in writing [4]

- sets out its exclusions for terrorism, civil unrest and strikes. Most insurers give only limited cover for terrorist acts [4]
- has a 24-hour assistance line. Carry the details and share them with someone at home [4]

If any part of the job is in an FCDO advise-against area, get written confirmation of cover before you go. If you travel against FCDO advice, you cannot get the FCDO's Exceptional Assistance Measures for victims of terrorism abroad [3].

Your employer's duty of care

How UK health and safety law applies abroad is limited, so it is worth being precise:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, including the general duties in sections 2 and 3, generally applies in Great Britain. It reaches outside Great Britain only where an Order extends it [19]. The current Order covers specified offshore energy and pipeline activities and certain work in UK territorial waters, not ordinary overseas work such as event operations [20].
- HSE says it does not investigate incidents outside Great Britain, and that risks arising abroad may be subject to the law of the country concerned (HSE guidance written for the armed forces) [21].
- That does not mean nobody is responsible. Local law applies. An employer's duty of care at common law (in Scotland, the law of delict; in England and Wales, the law of negligence) can extend to staff it sends abroad. What a client or engager owes a freelancer depends largely on the contract terms. How any of this applies to a particular job depends on the facts and is a question for a solicitor.

In practice, employers and clients would usually do a written, destination-specific risk assessment. HSE's lone working principles transfer well: assess the risks, train and supervise, keep in touch at agreed intervals and have a reliable way to confirm people are safe [22][23]. FCDO advises anyone



working abroad to know their employer's evacuation and contingency plans, and to make sure the employer has their next-of-kin details [3]. Freelancers should ask to see both.

Contracts and getting paid

Get these in writing before you travel:

- **Scope, dates, rates and cancellation**, including what happens if security or travel disruption cuts the job short.
- **Payment schedule and currency**: deposit, stages, final date and who pays bank and exchange charges.
- **Who pays for an early exit**. FCDO says you should not expect the UK government to evacuate you, and you may be charged for any charter flights it arranges [3]. Agree who pays for alternative travel, extra nights and lost days.
- **Passports**. It is illegal under UAE labour law [5] and in Saudi Arabia [6] for employers to hold your passport. Keep your own.
- **The right visa or permit** (see section 2).
- **Governing law and disputes**. Recovering unpaid fees across borders can be slow and costly, and local tax may be deducted. UK statutory late-payment interest applies only in limited cases where UK law governs the contract [34]. Take advice before relying on it.

2. On the ground

Staying informed and in touch

- **Follow local authorities** and local and international media, including airport and airspace news. Keep departure plans under review and stay away from security or military facilities [5][7] to [10]. Learn the local emergency alerts and numbers [3].
- **Check-ins**. Agree who calls whom, how often and what happens after a missed check-in. Test the system [23].
- **Local SIM or eSIM** for reliable data and a local number. Use an unlocked phone and carry a power bank.
- **Calling apps**. In the UAE, the regulator TDRA states that internet voice and video calls are a regulated activity. It says using a calling app that is not licensed, provided with a licensee or approved by TDRA is very likely to be illegal, and it lists approved apps [24]. Check other countries' rules on their FCDO pages [1]. Agree a fallback in advance.

Local laws and customs that affect crews

Rules vary by country, and sometimes within one.

- **Alcohol**. Drinking or being drunk in public is illegal in the UAE and Qatar, and alcohol is banned entirely in Sharjah [5][7]. For Saudi Arabia, do not bring alcohol in or arrive under its influence. Possession can bring severe penalties, including prison [6].
- **Medicines**. Some UK prescription and over-the-counter medicines are controlled in the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia [5] to [7]. The UAE requires approval for controlled medicines [5]. Qatar requires a recent prescription and medical report and has an online permit system [7]. For Saudi Arabia, carry an official prescription, hospital note or GP letter [6]. See TravelHealthPro [26].

- **Dress modestly**. In Qatar, men and women should cover shoulders and knees [7]. In Saudi Arabia, men and women must wear loose-fitting clothing covering the elbows and below the knees [6].
- **Behaviour**. Swearing and rude gestures, including online and while driving, are treated as offences in the UAE and Qatar [5][7]. In Saudi Arabia, avoid public affection, swearing, loud music and critical political statements [6].
- **Photography, filming and drones**. Do not photograph people without consent, or government, military or diplomatic sites [5] to [7]. In Saudi Arabia, producing or distributing video or other media needs advance permission from the General Authority of Media Regulation (GCAM), and do not capture or share images of conflict-related incidents [6]. Drones in Qatar may need licences to import or fly [7]. Assume you need a permit everywhere until confirmed otherwise, and build this into any content capture plan.
- **LGBT+ legal risks**. Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia [5] to [7]. See FCDO's LGBT+ travel advice [25]. Employers should factor this into planning, fully respecting the individual's privacy.
- **Ramadan**. Eating, drinking or smoking in public in daytime, loud music and dancing may cause offence, and opening hours change [5]. Plan catering, music checks and load-in around it. Dates vary by year and country [6].
- **Work permits, not visit visas**. In the UAE, working on a visit visa can lead to a fine or prison and deportation [5]. Qatar's visa on arrival is for tourism, and other purposes need a visa in advance [7]. Check each country's entry requirements [1] and get written confirmation of the visa or permit your role needs.

Heat

Summer temperatures in Saudi Arabia can exceed 50°C [6]. WHO calls heat an important occupational health hazard and heatstroke a medical emergency [30].

- **Work-rest cycles**. Move heavy work to cooler times, with more frequent breaks in shaded or cool rest areas [27][28].
- **Hydration**. Provide cool water and encourage small, frequent drinks [27]. Go easy on alcohol [29].
- **Acclimatisation**. Let workers acclimatise and identify who is more at risk, for example through medication or a health condition [27]. Don't give new arrivals the heaviest shifts.
- **Heat exhaustion**: tiredness, dizziness, headache, nausea, heavy sweating, cramps and thirst. Cool the person and give fluids. If they do not improve within 30 minutes, treat it as heatstroke and call emergency services [29].
- **Heatstroke is an emergency**: a very high temperature, hot skin that is not sweating, fast breathing, confusion, fits or collapse. Call emergency services and keep cooling the person [29].

Site security

- **Access control**. Know who controls access and how credentials work. Know how to report someone who shouldn't be there.



- **Crowds and protests.** Avoid crowds and demonstrations in a crisis [3]. Watch around the venue, not just inside it.
- **Muster point and shelter.** Everyone should know the muster point, the alternative and who does the headcount. Shelter in an interior stairwell or a room with as few external walls or windows as possible, and, in a high-rise building under air attack, on the lowest floor possible [3].
- **Unusual objects.** Don't approach or touch drone or missile fragments [5][7].

3. When things change

Escalation by level

Agree escalation before you travel:

- **Operational:** crew leads and individuals carrying out the plan: headcounts, check-ins, securing kit.
- **Tactical:** the lead on the ground who turns Strategic decisions into plans: moving people, changing schedules, liaising with the venue.
- **Strategic:** the senior decision-maker, often at head office or the client, who decides whether the job continues, pauses or ends, and makes decisions about leaving.

Record each role holder, their deputy, a backup contact route and what each level can decide alone.

Triggers to leave

Agree them in advance, for example:

- FCDO advises against travel to your location or tells British nationals to leave
- your insurer confirms cover no longer applies
- local authorities tell people to shelter or avoid your area
- widespread flight cancellations or expected airspace closures
- the Strategic lead judges the risk unacceptable

Anyone should be able to raise a concern and step back without penalty.

Evacuation planning

- **Routes.** Plan at least 2 ways out. FCDO currently suggests people leaving Saudi Arabia consider going by land to a neighbouring country and flying from there [6]. Check that country's entry rules in advance.
- **Airspace.** Expect periodic closures and cancellations across the region [5][7] to [10]. Use flexible tickets where you can.
- **Documents.** Keep passports, visas and insurance details current and to hand. Passport and visa services may be unavailable in a crisis [3].
- **Grab bag.** Prescription medicines, food and water for several days, a first aid kit, a torch and batteries [3], plus chargers, cash and document copies.
- **FCDO help can be limited.** FCDO says its help may be very limited, particularly where it advises against travel, and you should have your own plans to leave [3]. In some countries consular support is severely limited or not

available [15] to [17]. FCDO's 24-hour contact details are on its crisis page [3].

Country notes (as at 20 October 2026)

Summary only. Read the full FCDO page.

- **Saudi Arabia:** all travel advised against within 10km of the Yemen border, and **all but essential travel to the rest of the country**. FCDO advises staying away from King Khalid International Airport, Riyadh, until it is secure, and says further attacks on airports, and resulting disruption and cancellations, are very likely. Avoid capturing or sharing images of conflict-related incidents [6].
- **Iran, Syria, Yemen:** all travel advised against for the whole country. UK support is extremely limited or not available [15] to [17].
- **Iraq:** all travel advised against in several provinces and border areas, and all but essential travel to most other areas, including the Kurdistan Region [14].
- **Israel and Palestine:** all travel advised against for Gaza and specified border and West Bank areas, and all but essential travel elsewhere in specified areas [12][35].
- **Lebanon:** all travel or all but essential travel advised against for specified areas, including parts of Beirut's southern suburbs and the south [13].
- **Jordan:** all travel advised against within 3km of the Syrian border [11].
- **Egypt:** travel advised against in specified areas, including North Sinai and near the Libyan border [18].
- **UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman:** no advise-against areas at the time of writing, but each page warns of regional tensions and disruption [5][7] to [10].

4. Coming home

- **Welfare check** with every crew member after they return, especially after a disrupted job.
- **Rest and debrief.** Allow rest before the next job. A short debrief helps people process events and captures lessons.
- **Fatigue** slows reactions, causes memory lapses and leads people to underestimate risk. Manage it like any other hazard [31]. Think twice before driving home after a long-haul flight.
- **Signs of stress** include mood swings, withdrawal, loss of motivation or confidence and being more tearful, sensitive or aggressive [32]. They can appear weeks later.
- **Support.** Talk to your manager, a colleague or your GP [32]. The NHS lists urgent mental health help [33]. FCDO also points to the British Red Cross for people affected by a crisis abroad [3].

Checklist

- ☐ **Before you go:** FCDO pages and alerts, re-checks set, insurance confirmed in writing, risk assessment and evacuation plan seen, written terms (payment, cancellation, exit costs, passport, visa or permit)
- ☐ **On the ground:** check-ins tested with a fallback, medicines paperwork carried, crew briefed on local laws, heat plan, muster point, shelter and headcount owner known



- ☐ **When things change:** Operational, Tactical and Strategic roles and deputies named, triggers written down, 2 exit routes, grab bag packed, everyone knows FCDO may not evacuate them
- ☐ **Coming home:** welfare check, rest, debrief, crew know the signs of stress and where to get support

References

All web sources accessed 20 October 2026. 'Updated' dates are the last-updated dates shown by GOV.UK for each page.

1. FCDO, 'Foreign travel advice'. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
2. FCDO, 'Foreign travel advice: email alerts sign-up'. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/email-signup>
3. FCDO, 'Prepare for and deal with crises abroad' (updated 16 October 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-deal-with-a-crisis-overseas>
4. FCDO, 'Foreign travel insurance'. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-insurance>
5. FCDO, 'United Arab Emirates travel advice' (updated 24 July 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/united-arab-emirates>
6. FCDO, 'Saudi Arabia travel advice' (updated 17 October 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/saudi-arabia>
7. FCDO, 'Qatar travel advice' (updated 19 August 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/qatar>
8. FCDO, 'Bahrain travel advice' (updated 8 October 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/bahrain>
9. FCDO, 'Kuwait travel advice' (updated 20 August 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/kuwait>
10. FCDO, 'Oman travel advice' (updated 22 July 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/oman>
11. FCDO, 'Jordan travel advice' (updated 10 September 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/jordan>
12. FCDO, 'Israel travel advice' (updated 22 July 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>
13. FCDO, 'Lebanon travel advice' (updated 10 August 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/lebanon>
14. FCDO, 'Iraq travel advice' (updated 22 July 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iraq>
15. FCDO, 'Iran travel advice' (updated 13 August 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran>
16. FCDO, 'Syria travel advice' (updated 2 September 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/syria>
17. FCDO, 'Yemen travel advice' (updated 31 July 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/yemen>
18. FCDO, 'Egypt travel advice' (updated 4 August 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/egypt>
19. 'Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974', section 84 (extent and application). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37/section/84>
20. 'The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (Application outside Great Britain) Order 2013' (SI 2013/240). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/240/contents>
21. HSE, 'Ministry of Defence and the armed forces: frequently asked questions' (application of GB health and safety law outside Great Britain). Written for the armed forces; it refers to the 2001 Order, since replaced by the 2013 Order [20]. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/services/armedforces/faqs.htm>
22. HSE, 'Lone working: manage the risks of working alone'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/employer/manage-the-risks-of-working-alone.htm>
23. HSE, 'Lone working: training, supervision and monitoring'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/employer/training-supervision-monitoring.htm>
24. UAE Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority (TDRA), 'FAQs' (VoIP). <https://tdra.gov.ae/en/FAQs>
25. FCDO, 'Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender foreign travel advice'. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice>
26. TravelHealthPro (NaTHNaC), 'Medicines and travel'. <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/43/medicines-abroad>
27. HSE, 'Temperature in the workplace: heat stress'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/heat-stress.htm>
28. HSE, 'Temperature in the workplace: outdoor working'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/outdoor-working.htm>
29. NHS, 'Heat exhaustion and heatstroke'. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heat-exhaustion-heatstroke/>
30. WHO, 'Heat and health' fact sheet (31 July 2026). <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-heat-and-health>
31. HSE, 'Fatigue'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/topics/fatigue.htm>
32. HSE, 'Work-related stress: signs of stress'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/signs.htm>
33. NHS, 'Where to get urgent help for mental health'. <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/>
34. 'Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998', section 12 (conflict of laws). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/20/section/12>
35. FCDO, 'Palestine travel advice' (updated 22 July 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/palestine>

Published by OTAS Live Ltd. General information only, correct as of 20 October 2026. It is not legal, insurance, medical or security advice and does not replace risk assessments or current FCDO travel advice.

Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

Corrections: if you spot an error, tell us using the contact details on the OTAS Insights page and we will correct it and update the 'Correct as of' date. To ask for this briefing in another format, use the same contact details.

OTAS Insights: otas.live/insights/



Work with OTAS

Need help planning crew travel for work abroad?

Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help

OTAS Live Ltd. Registered in Scotland, company number SC755102.