



USA TODAY™

A GANNETT COMPANY

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Global Rescue's globe-trotting CEO, Dan Richards, shares some tips on business travel with USA Today



Founder and CEO of Global Rescue, Dan Richards, spends more than 100 days on the road each year. The Boston based crisis response company has a growing list of clients, ranging from individuals and their families to the employees of large corporations and government entities. The global nature of these clients means his schedule is relentless.

Here Dan talks to USA Today about how he keeps business travel safe and comfortable: Dan Richards is a globe-trotting CEO. But he learned one of his most important tips for the road when he was a college student trekking through Tunisia.

Richards was driving bare-chested in the desert one day in 1994 when he got pulled over. Apparently the policeman disapproved of Richards driving around with no shirt and was going to arrest him. "I almost ended up in a bad spot for no other reason than being ignorant of the local customs," says Richards, 38. Richards apologized and avoided a trip to jail. But he learned a critical lesson. "Be aware of what the local culture is," he says. "Do not stick out in any way. Leave your San Francisco Giants hat at home." Nearly two decades later, Richards has gathered many more pointers — particularly for traveling overseas — as founder of Global Rescue, a company that ferries travelers out of danger zones or to a hospital when they fall ill far from home. Last year he was on the road more than 100 days, logging 100,000 to 150,000 miles.

Richards, who had worked in finance, started the company in 2004 to fill a void he observed among businesses providing travel assistance. They had call centers that clients could contact in an emergency, but they "didn't have the ability to put boots on the ground during a crisis," he says. "If you're in a hospital bed in a developing country, you want to pick up the phone and know that the cavalry is, in fact, coming."

Enter Global Rescue. Travelers can buy memberships that allow them to call for medical advice from physicians and, if needed, be evacuated to a hospital that they choose from anywhere in the world. "On the security side," Richards says, "if you're caught in a place where there's civil unrest or revolution or war, we actually deploy former military" to get you out. The company, whose clients include families, corporations and government entities, has rescued people from locations ranging from the former Soviet Republic of Georgia to the Himalayas. It evacuated hundreds from the Middle East during Arab Spring. It also dispatched medical and security staff to Haiti in 2010 after the island was struck by an earthquake and to Japan last year when it was hit by an earthquake and tsunami.

Richards is not usually part of his company's rescue missions. But every other week he takes to the road to meet with clients and seek new niches for his business. Exploring new places and opportunities is what he loves most about his travels.

"Business travel today is, despite some of the problems, easier than it's ever been," he says. "You can be almost anywhere in the world in 24 hours, and that's very exciting. That's probably the best thing about business travel."

He also likes turning a business trip into a mini-vacation, particularly when his wife, Melissa Roth, Global Rescue's general counsel and vice president, can go along. And if the trip is to an isolated or troubled locale, Richards doesn't leave home without a satellite phone.

"Your ability to communicate is the single most important capability to have in a crisis," he says. He's not just talking about foreign war zones. Richards found that his satellite phone came in handy last summer in Downieville, Calif., a mountain-biking mecca 190 miles northeast of San Francisco. "We had some questions about where we were," says Richards, who visited the town with his wife. "And I didn't want to use the services of my own company to rescue me."

Preparedness is a hallmark of Richards' frequent business trips — from the change of underwear he tucks into his briefcase to the research he does on the political climate of his destination. "There should be a recent events and security summary so you can make an assessment about how safe the environment is," Richards says. He recommends travelers going overseas put together a report detailing what vaccinations they need and what documents are required to enter and leave the country. Be medically prepared, as well. "It does make sense to have a supply of antibiotics if you need them."

Richards frets that in some foreign cities, it can take hours to get to the airport from downtown. And like many fliers, Richards is irritated by heavy airport security. "It's a necessary evil, and security is terribly important, but at the same time, for the frequent business traveler, it's inconvenient." He has some strategies for dealing with it: "If you can, wear slip-ons, not lace-ups," Richards says of shoes to help get through security faster. And "if you don't have to bring your laptop, don't. Wear clothes that are comfortable and easily manipulated."

Richards exercises on the road to keep stress in check. But his workouts also serve a purpose before his journey begins. "I'll really hammer in the gym or some kind of workout prior to going to the airport so I'm very tired and much more likely to sleep (on a long flight)," he says. "When I arrive, I'm much fresher." He prefers to stay at the same brand of hotels for a bit of constancy in a faraway place. "Having a chain of hotels that I'm familiar with, like Marriott, and having their worldwide reach is comforting, because when you go to some of these foreign countries you know exactly what you're going to get," he says. He recommends staying in lower-level hotel floors in nations where the building codes aren't as stringent, so that it's easier to get out in an emergency.

And watch what you eat. "One of the most frequent travel problems we encounter in our business is stomach upset and travelers' diarrhea," he says. To lower the risk, he says, travelers should wash their hands with soap longer than they might normally. And while he loves sampling local cuisine, visitors may want to avoid grabbing a snack from the food cart in front of the hotel.

Richards sticks to bottled water and keeps a stash of meal-replacement bars in his luggage. U.S. dollars in your pocket are great, but a little local currency is also a good bet, he advises. "It's always good to have local currency and it's good to have a few hundred dollars so if you have a problem, you can pay your way out of it," Richards says — noting, for instance, that you may get dropped off in the wrong place and need a local's help. After all the planning, flying and visiting, Richards has one final tip: "Get as much rest as you possibly can before, during and after your trip," he says. "I try not to book lots of travel back-to-back, so that way I have time to recover from one trip to the next."

Tips for overseas travel:

- Carry a satellite phone when traveling to remote or politically volatile destinations.
- Wear slip-on shoes to get through airport screening faster.
- Do your homework. Write a report before you fly on what shots and documents you'll need.
- Get a hotel room that's above the street, but not too high.
- Blend in. Leave the jewelry and sports logos at home.
- Carry a little cash, both U.S. and local.
- Pack meal-replacement bars so you'll always have a snack.