How not to be afraid of terrorism when you travel

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When I tell friends I am traveling abroad they sometimes freak out about "how dangerous it is" "what about the terrorism?".

Case in point bomb in Bangkok this year where I will be traveling in October for a conference.

My advice:

- follow your gut
- be careful
- look at the real risk probabilities.

I remember last year all the fear around the coup/martial law in Thailand. It was a complete non-issue once I was on the ground there.

That is also my experience with all other news stories about countries I have visited. The news and US State Dept reports are full of negative hype (that is what sells news) and the reality is completely different. Yes the events happen and they are such a small part of the total reality you have to go looking for them to see them when you are there.

Looking at this from a rational risk probability of death you are far more likely to die other ways

Here are common probabilities of dying (source):

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Pedestrian                        1 in 47,273

Car occupant            1 in 17,625

While on railway train    1 in 10,283,615

air/ space accidents      1 in 440,951

Fire                              1 in 91,149

venomous snakes    1 in  95,980,407
venomous spiders    1 in 28,794,122

Poison/OD               1 in 16,407

Self harm               1 in 9,096

Assault                1 in 16,325

                        Childbirth (mom)        1 death of mother per 5000 live births in US/
Terrorism deaths       1 in 1,700,000 to 1 in 20,000,000 (
                        source
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So! I would be far more concerned about risks from cars, suicide/depression, muggings or pregnancy than bombs in

bangkok. (Risk reduction: put on seat belt in taxi/pick a safe driver, not walking drunk at 3am in bad neighborhood, self mental health care are all good ways to reduce these risks.)

For a discussion of the real terrorism risk and some insight on to why we spend so much extra time and money on this risk the article in Reason magazine is useful.

Basically both the news media and government get an enormous amount of benefit from amplifying the terrorist threat. The news sell more stories/advertising, the government gets to spend trillions on DHS easily changing laws to control/spy on their citizens.