



Death in a foreign country

■ Local burial

This is often the least expensive option; however, a few countries do not allow the burial of foreigners. The Consular Officer will be able to tell you.

■ Cremation

Available in most countries, it may be prohibited or limited in predominantly Catholic or Muslim countries. Some countries have few crematories, which might increase cost and delay the return of the ashes. However, compared to the high cost of transporting a body, cremated remains can be returned home inexpensively. You can mail them, or take them on an airplane at no cost—as carry-on (in a container that can be x-rayed) or packed in luggage.

■ Body donation

There is an urgent need for body donors in many countries. The Consular Officer should be able to assist with arrangements.

■ Returning the body to the US

Preparation and shipment are according to local laws, regulations, and customs. Embalming is not widely practiced in most foreign countries, though there are other methods of preparation for shipment, some of which will preclude viewing (such as chemically saturated shrouds). Charges for these services are high and vary widely from one location to another. After receipt of the necessary funds, there may be a 3 to 10-day interval until actual shipment.

You will need to notify a funeral director in the US who can assist with arrangements.

Death in the US

■ Cremation

If death occurs away from home and there is no need for a viewing or funeral service prior to cremation, it is usually easy to locate an affordable cremation at the place of death. After cremation, the ashes can then be carried or mailed home.

Search online for “cremation” and the state name. Compare prices, making sure that you confirm that the price is all-inclusive, including the crematory and permit fees.

Funeral Consumers Alliance members are entitled to any discount offered by the local affiliate. If there is no local affiliate or if the deceased is not a member, call the FCA office at 802-865-8300. We have names of trustworthy providers in many areas of the country.

■ Preparing the body for burial

If there is no need for a viewing or funeral service in the area where death occurred, you will generally save money by working through a funeral director located where the body is headed (home), not at the place of death. Call funeral homes in your home state and ask the price of **Receiving Remains** (one of the FTC-required options offered by all funeral homes). This usually includes picking up the body at the airport, filing permits and the death certificate, and transportation to the cemetery; it might be as low as \$500 but can be \$3,000 or more.

If the body has already been taken to a funeral home at the place of death, ask about the price for **Forwarding Remains** (another FTC-required option offered by all funeral homes). The charge for this service can be anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000 or more. This will usually include pick-up of the body, embalming, and possibly a shipping container as well as transportation to the nearest airport. (The General Price List must indicate which items and services are included.) This price is often much less than the individual items priced separately, but is generally more than the charge for Receiving Remains.

NOTE: Whether purchasing the Forwarding Remains or Receiving Remains packages, the cost of the airline ticket is additional.

■ Shipping the body

Ask the funeral director to use a shipping service such as Inman Nationwide. As of 2020, Inman charges funeral homes \$995 to pick up a body anywhere in the contiguous US, get permits, the death certificate, embalm, and deliver to the airport. There may be an additional mileage charge if the Inman agent in your area must travel any great distance.

There are two kinds of Airtrays or shipping containers: one carries just the body, the other covers and protects a casket. The wholesale costs are about \$60 to \$100. If the funeral home is going to charge more than \$200 or so, you might ask if there is a used one that can be recycled for a reduced cost. Most funeral homes have a few in the garage, and it doesn't hurt to ask.



■ Transporting the body yourself

In most states, it's legal for family to transport the body. Even renting a van might be considerably less expensive than airfare, and such a journey can have some therapeutic value. Only Alabama, Arkansas and New Jersey require embalming when crossing state lines (several others require it if public transportation is used), but it's possible an exception would be made if the family were transporting the body. If you plan to transport a body yourself, please call the FCA office for advice.

■ Buying a casket

If there is a need to have viewing or a funeral service in the state where death occurred, you'll want a casket before the body is shipped to the other location. If not, purchase your casket from the receiving funeral director or from a third party vendor. In selecting a casket, specifically avoid a "sealer." An affordable casket would be a 20-gauge "non-protective" steel casket or a cloth-covered wood or fiberboard one.

■ Making cemetery arrangements

Cemetery charges and any funeral services will be extra. After getting a price for Receiving Remains from the funeral home in the state where the burial will occur, ask the cost of a Graveside Service (usually about \$150 to \$350) if relatives and friends will want to be in attendance.

It is also a good idea to call the cemetery directly to check on prices for opening and closing the grave and whether or not the cemetery sells the grave liner or vault it will probably require. It may cost

less through the cemetery, but not always. There is no advantage in purchasing an expensive or sealed vault.

Other information

■ Bereavement airfares

These airfares are largely a thing of the past, and generally weren't a good deal anyway. Your best bet for lower-priced seats is to check the variety of websites that offer discount airline fares.

■ Authorizations

Carry your Living Will, Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare, Advance Health Care Directive and Agent for Body Disposition forms with you when traveling. If cremation is planned, you should include a statement authorizing your own cremation. Although the forms may not carry full authority in the state or country in which illness or death occurs, they will give guidance to others as to your wishes.

■ Body donation

If you had planned to be a body donor, you may wish to amend your donor card to indicate "or nearest medical school." Otherwise, your estate may be slapped with a hefty fee to transport your body to the school in which you first enrolled.

Death Away from Home

Funeral Consumers Alliance™

Dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified, and affordable funeral