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Pune: Travel for long-haul international destinations such as the USA, Europe and West Asian countries from India has seen a noticeable dip this summer compared to the same period last year amid geopolitical tensions, airspace disruptions and uncertainty, according to insurance companies. Even the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which usually has a strong summer travel market for Indians, is seeing fewer travellers amid concerns over regional instability. According to the data from Policybazaar, year-on-year bookings to the UAE dropped by over 70% this summer. "This summer, we have been witnessing a noticeable shift in outbound travel patterns.

The decline in travellers heading to traditionally popular long-haul destinations such as the USA, Canada, and several Schengen countries was largely due to visa processing delays, higher travel costs and uncertainty around approvals," Manas Kapoor, head of travel insurance in Policybazaar, told TOI. While long-haul destinations like the USA and Europe are slowing down because of airspace restrictions and rising fares, this is prompting travellers to plan shorter, more cost-efficient overseas trips.

People who previously planned to go on long-haul trips are also changing their preferences and opting for either shorter regional trips or travel to nearby international destinations. "My daughter has just completed her Standard X exams. We wanted to go on holiday in the USA, but there has been uncertainty about flights. We have now planned to visit Singapore," said Tanvi Merchant, a resident of Kondhwa. On the other hand, the trend of travel insurance is seeing an uptick. According to the Policybazaar data, travel insurance policy issuance has increased by 22% year-on-year, with majority of travellers opting for destinations in the Asia-Pacific region. "Customers have increasingly been opting for covers of USD 1,00,000 and above.

We have also been seeing a rise in family floater travel policies, multi-trip annual plans among frequent flyers, and greater interest in benefits for trip cancellation and curtailment," Narendra Bharindwal, Insurance Brokers Association of India (IBAI) president, told TOI. Advisors and brokers are playing a proactive role in flagging destination-specific risks at the point of sale, added Bharindwal. Rakesh Kaul, chief distribution officer (retail business) of Bajaj General Insurance, told TOI, "One of the key trends that we witnessed has been of comprehensive policies. These policies covered a wide range of uncertainties, including trip cancellations, delays

and medical emergencies. Travellers were increasingly looking at end-to-end coverage to ensure a smoother and more secure travel experience.

For travellers, who have already planned their overseas trips, choosing a well-rounded policy has become essential to manage unforeseen situations,” he said. Insurers are allowing customers to choose the base cover and add specific riders based on their destination, trip type, or health profile. Insurers said customers were now expecting instant policy issuance, paperless claims and real-time 24/7 assistance, not just on the voice helpline but also through apps and chat interfaces. “There was a need for instant assistance if a flight was cancelled or luggage lost, or any other emergency arose. Many insurers were now offering this service. There were also flexible policy options with customisation pathways,” said Raj Kulkarni, a resident of Pashan.