

Safety and Security Recommendations For Students Traveling Abroad

“Act Smart. Be Safe.”

Before You Go

- Read up on your destination (Be prepared, though don't panic)
 - Review State Department travel information, including risks and trends.
 - Review information on travel sites such as Trip Advisor and other forums. Consider warnings about locations (i.e., outdoor, alley ways, etc.) or locations at which people have shared concerns (i.e., bad feeling, a negative experience, etc.).
 - Remember you are subject to the laws and the justice system where you travel.
- Pack Accordingly
 - Each country may have different local laws and customs about women's clothing and appearance. For example, what you wear in a mall in Mexico might not be acceptable in a mall in the United Arab Emirates.
 - Consider if you would like to avoid flashy clothing or items that may signify status or wealth (i.e., expensive jewelry, fashion clothing, etc.).
- Be aware that local customs and laws may not provide equal protection for women and the LGBTQ+ community. You are more likely to experience difficulties in rural areas, so be discreet.
- Be aware of any Travel Advisories.
- Carry contact details for the nearest U.S. embassy or U.S. consulate with you, in English and the local language.
- Ensure you have all the proper documents – leave a copy with a family member back home.
- Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). A free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling abroad to enroll their trip.
 - **Benefits of STEP:**
 - Receive important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, helping you make informed decisions about your travel plans.
 - Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family emergency.
 - Help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency.
 - <https://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>

While Traveling

- Be courteous and cooperative when processing through customs. Do not leave your bags unattended. Stay alert.
- Avoid long waits in lobbies and terminals, if possible. These areas may harbor pickpockets, thieves, and violent offenders.
- If you are not fluent in a foreign language, learn how to say, “I'm sorry, I don't speak _____. Do you speak English?” This politeness goes a long way.

While Abroad

Safety with Valuables

- Don't flash your cash! Be subtle with your money. In places notorious for pickpocketing, consider a small 'dummy' wallet. This can be filled with old cards (i.e., store membership cards and a few dollar bills) to simulate a real wallet. Some suggest offering the dummy wallet (or throwing it as you head the other way) if demanded. Seek an exit where possible, but never a physical altercation. There is rarely just one pickpocket, and others may quickly come to their aid, perhaps at the expense of your safety.
- Carry small bills when possible to purchase items. If in a store, consider transferring the right amount of cash for the purchase to a pocket, only showing what is necessary for the purchase, and with very little change in return.
- Keep credit cards, valuables, and jewelry to a minimum. In short, don't draw attention to yourself as a potential target for crime. (you can have these items, just not on your person at all times)
- When out, if you feel a bump or someone shares that you have something on your clothing (i.e., ketchup, honey, mustard, etc.) and offer to clean it up, be appreciative but wary. This may be an attempt to direct your attention elsewhere during which time valuables are stolen.
- Depending on the culture, consider making eye contact where appropriate. Eye contact can communicate alertness, as well as an opportunity to identify someone in the case of theft.
- If using a map service on a phone, stop in a safe place and map the route for the next several blocks. Then, stop again and repeat. Look like you know where you are going, and know the area. Carrying a phone and not paying attention to your surroundings may invite unwanted attention.
- Protect your passport! Keep the passport in a safe in your lodging, carry a photocopy at all times.

Safety in Public and with Others

- Stay with a group when exploring the local scene. Groups of 2-3 (or more) are strongly recommended.
- Do not invite strangers into your room.
- If drinking beverages, do not leave drinks unattended. If possible, order a bottle you can open yourself. If not possible, be observant for any suspicious activity around the pouring of your beverage. In some cases, a person may seek to add a substance that causes severe confusion (i.e., Rohypnol).
- Avoid civil disturbances. If you come upon a demonstration or rally, be careful; in the confusion you could be arrested or detained even though you are a bystander.
- Evade criminals or terrorists by being aware of your surroundings and alert to the possibility of surveillance.
- If something seems suspicious, seek a building with a business (i.e., coffee shop, bank) where others are around and you can re-evaluate the situation in a safe place.
- Beware of new acquaintances who probe for information about you or who attempt to get you involved in what could become a compromising situation.
- Create Boundaries - Be cautious when sharing information about your plans and itinerary with strangers.

- Use crosswalks and caution when crossing the street. In some locations, crossing at unmarked locations is an easy stop for law enforcement.

Technology

- Beware that your conversations may not be private or secure. Unlike the United States, most other countries do not have legal restrictions against technical surveillance.
- In most countries, you have no expectation of privacy in Internet cafes, hotels, airplanes, offices, or public spaces. All information you send electronically (fax, computer, telephone) can be intercepted, especially wireless communications.
- Change all your passwords including your voicemail and check devices for malware when you return.
- Report any unusual circumstances or noteworthy incidents to your study away program manager and to the FBI.
- Your phone is often used as a camera. It may present an opportunity for someone to take the phone if you ask someone to take a photo, or if someone offers to take a photo.

Transportation

- The safety of public transportation varies from country to country. In many places, informal taxis or mini-buses pose particular threats to people unfamiliar with the local conditions, especially to women traveling alone. Find out from reliable sources, such as local authorities or tourism officials, what is and is not safe.
- Use only authorized taxis. Passengers have been robbed or kidnapped when using unregistered taxis.
- Ask at the hotel (or your program) which taxis or companies are recommended.
- More locations are now offering app based taxi options (i.e., Uber, Lyft or a local similar service). Consider an app based service, or a radio dispatched service).
- Beware that theft from sleeping compartments on trains is common.
- Do not leave valuables in suitcases, particularly when the items will be out of your control (i.e., plane, train, tour bus).
- Avoid traveling alone, especially after dark.