



## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** AUBURN UNIVERSITY FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS  
**FROM:** DEPARTMENT OF RISK MANAGEMENT & INSURANCE  
**SUBJECT:** FOREIGN TRAVEL GUIDELINES AND TIPS FOR STUDENTS  
**DATE:** PUBLISHED 4/14/2008

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## **Foreign Travel Guidelines and Tips for Students**

**Personal safety is the traveler's responsibility. The following list of non-exclusive safety tips for domestic travel is provided by the Auburn University Department of Risk Management and Insurance to students traveling abroad.**

### **Driving in a Foreign Country**

#### **Tips on Driving Abroad**

- Helpful information online.
  - Check the United States Department of State website for up-to-date information on driving in a foreign country. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_1179.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1179.html)
  - The Department of State website also contains Consular Information Sheets with safety issues, including driver safety, in most foreign countries. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html)
  - The Department of state website also contains Background Notes on most foreign countries that may provide helpful driver information. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>
  - Check with the embassy or consulate of the countries where you will visit to learn about requirements for driver's licenses, road permits, and auto insurance. <http://usembassy.state.gov/>
- Information may also be available from the foreign embassy in the United States, foreign government tourism offices, or from a car rental company in the foreign country.
  - Links to foreign embassies. <http://www.embassy.org/embassies/index.html>
  - Links to foreign tourism offices. <http://www.towd.com/>
- It is important to be aware of the rules of the road in other countries, and the fact that road conditions can vary widely. It is also important to be aware of security concerns when driving abroad.
- Determine whether obtaining an International Driving Permit (IDP) through the State Department is required or would be helpful.
  - Carry both your IDP and your state driver's license with you at all times. Many countries have different driving rules. If possible, obtain a copy of the foreign country's rules before you begin driving in that country.
  - Although many countries do not recognize U.S. driver's licenses, most countries accept an international driving permit (IDP).

- IDPs are honored in more than 150 countries outside the U.S.
- They function as an official translation of a U.S. driver's license into 10 foreign languages. These licenses are not intended to replace valid U.S. state licenses and should only be used as a supplement to a valid license. IDPs are not valid in an individual's country of residence.
- Before departure, you can obtain an IDP at a local office of one of the two automobile associations authorized by the U.S. Department of State:
  - The American Automobile Association, and
    - [http://www.aaa.com/vacation/idpapplc.html?association=AAA&clb\\_id=212&secure=N](http://www.aaa.com/vacation/idpapplc.html?association=AAA&clb_id=212&secure=N)
  - The American Automobile Touring Alliance.
    - [http://thenac.com/international\\_driving\\_permit.pdf](http://thenac.com/international_driving_permit.pdf)
- To apply for an international driving permit, you must be at least age 18, and you will need to present two passport-size photographs and your valid U.S. license.
- Some countries have a minimum and maximum driving age.
- Certain countries require road permits, instead of tolls, to use on their divided highways, and they will fine those found driving without a permit.
- Always "buckle up." Some countries have penalties for people who violate this law.
- Many countries require you to honk your horn before going around a sharp corner or to flash your lights before passing.
- Before you start your journey, find out who has the right of way in a traffic circle.
- If the drivers in the country you are visiting drive on the opposite side of the road than in the U.S., it may be prudent to practice driving in a less populated area before attempting to drive in heavy traffic.
- Always know the route you will be traveling. Have a copy of a good road map, and chart your course before beginning.
- Do not pick up hitchhikers or strangers.
- When entering your vehicle, be aware of your surroundings.

### **Avoiding a Carjacking**

- Helpful information online.
  - Check the United States Department of State website for detailed information on handling carjacking situations. <http://www.state.gov/m/ds/rls/rpt/19782.htm>
- When in your car, always keep the doors locked. Any time you drive through areas containing stoplights, stop signs, or anything that significantly reduces vehicular speed, keep your windows up.
- Leave ample maneuvering space between your vehicle and the one in front of you. If you are approached by suspicious persons while you are stopped, do not roll down windows; drive away quickly.
- If you are being followed or harassed by another driver, try to find the nearest police station, hotel, or other public facility. Once you find a place of safety, don't worry about using a legal parking space. Park as close as you can, and get inside fast.
- If another driver tries to force you to pull over or to cut you off, keep driving and try to get away. Try to note the license plate number of the car and a description of the car and driver. If this effort places you in danger, don't do it. The information is not as important as your safety.
- If you are being followed, never lead the person back to your home or stop and get out. Drive to the nearest police station, public facility, or U.S. mission. (You could verify surveillance by going completely around an arbitrarily chosen block.)

- If you are traveling alone and a car “bumps” into you, don’t stop to exchange accident information. Go to the nearest service station or other public place to call the police.
- Never, ever pick up hitchhikers!
- When you park, look for a spot that offers good lighting and is close to a location where there are a lot of people. Lock valuables in the trunk, and lock all doors.
- Extra precautions are necessary when shopping. If you take packages out to lock them in your trunk, then plan to return to the stores to do more shopping, it may be a good idea to move your car to another section of the parking lot or street. The criminal knows that you will be coming back and can wait to ambush you. By moving your car, you give the impression you’re leaving. If you think you are being followed, do not go back to your car. Return to the safety of the occupied shopping area or office building and contact the authorities.
- If you have car trouble on the road, raise your hood. If you have a radio antenna, place a handkerchief or other flag there. When people stop to help, don’t get out of the car unless you know them or it’s the police. Ask the “good samaritan” to stop at the nearest service station and report your problem.
- If you are in a parking lot or parked on the street and have trouble, be wary of personal assistance from strangers. Go to the nearest telephone and call a repair service or friend for assistance. If you feel threatened by the presence of nearby strangers, lock yourself in your car and blow the horn to attract attention of others.

### **General Driving Tips**

- Reliable transportation should be selected. A Pre-Trip inspection of the vehicle is recommended.
- Driver should operate the vehicle in a professional manner.
- Driver should be in possession of a valid driver license.
- Driver should have experience driving the type of vehicle he/she will be operating for Auburn University.
- Fifteen-Passenger Vans should not be used to transport passengers.
- Driver should attend Auburn University’s Defensive Driving Class or other approved defensive driver training program.
- Driver of Fifteen-Passenger Vans should attend Auburn University’s Van Safety Class.
- Driver should have an acceptable motor vehicle record.
- Seat belts and other occupant restraint devices should be worn at all times by the driver and occupants.
- Driver should operate the vehicle in accordance with all traffic laws, ordinances and regulations.
- Vehicles should not be used to transport unauthorized passengers.
- Vehicle should be driven at speeds that are appropriate for road conditions.
- Driver should not use a cellular phone when vehicle is in motion.
- Driver should not drive if drowsy or under the influence of any substance.
- Driver should not drive for long periods of time without breaks. Breaks are recommended at a minimum of every two hours. Maximum driving time recommended in a 24 hour period is eight (8) hours.
- Driver should know the route and an alternative route prior to departure.
- Driver should know the predicted weather prior to departure. If inclement weather is expected, consider setting guidelines for alternate transportation.
- Driver should turn off the vehicle, remove the keys and lock the doors when left unattended.
- Driver should immediately report all accidents to the local law enforcement agency, immediate supervisor and Risk Management and Safety.

## **Use of Privately Owned Vehicles**

- Personal vehicles should only be used on a voluntary basis; the owners/drivers must provide their own insurance coverage; all student participants choosing to ride in a private automobile do so voluntarily and at their own risk.
  - The University shall not insure or accept liability for any damage, loss or injury resulting from the use of a student participant's vehicle(s).
  - The University does not provide comprehensive or collision (physical damage) insurance for an employee's personal vehicle driven on University business and the employee is responsible for primary liability insurance.
  - The University does carry non-owner excess liability coverage to protect the University and employee in the event of a suit resulting from an automobile accident in which an employee was driving on university business
- While private automobiles provide a very cost effective means of transportation, there are disadvantages that must be considered. Liability issues should be a primary concern for those that choose to use personal automobiles to travel. Be sure that your personal vehicle has appropriate insurance, current inspection and registration and that others traveling with you in your private vehicle understand that they do so at their own risk. Drivers should be aware that by choosing to drive, they assume responsibility for the safety of those traveling in their vehicle. This means that drivers should take care to follow all traffic laws and safety guidelines, and should also make sure that their vehicle is in a safe working condition before beginning the trip.
- If you use your own personal vehicle, and/or transport others as passengers, be aware that your own personal insurance will be primarily responsible for any liability that may arise from such use.
- Students driving privately owned vehicles should:
  - Have a valid driver's license
  - Possess personal automobile insurance coverage as mandated by the State of Alabama
  - Have a current vehicle registration

*Note: Auburn University is not responsible for personal items left in a vehicle.*

*It is also recommended that group travel be contracted with an outside vendor whenever possible/practical.*

## **Car Insurance**

- Car rental agencies overseas usually provide auto insurance, but in some countries, the required coverage is minimal. When renting a car overseas, consider purchasing insurance coverage that is at least equivalent to that which you carry at home.
- In general, your U.S. auto insurance does not cover you abroad. However, your policy may apply when you drive to countries neighboring the United States.
- Check with your insurer to see if your policy covers you in Canada, Mexico, or countries south of Mexico. Even if your policy is valid in one of these countries, it may not meet that country's minimum requirements. For instance, in most of Canada, you must carry at least \$200,000 in liability insurance, and Mexico requires that, if vehicles do not carry theft, third party liability, and comprehensive insurance, the owner must post a bond that could be as high as 50% of the value of the vehicle.
- If you are under-insured for a country, auto insurance can usually be purchased on either side of the border.

## **Taxi and Mass Transit Safety Checklist**

### **Suggestions for Road Safety in a Taxi**

- Be aware of traffic patterns and local road culture.
- Avoid overcrowded taxis.
- Be alert for reckless driving (e.g. speeding, inattention to driving, apparent drowsiness, disregard for signage and signals).
- If driver is irresponsible, get out at first safe opportunity.
- If you feel you are at risk, speak up!
- Avoid riding with drivers who seem to be under influence of alcohol or medication, or appear over-tired, irrational or distracted.
- Ride only in taxis with functional seat-belts in back seat.
- Avoid night travel, especially in rural areas.

### **Suggestions for Physical Security in a Taxi**

- If you are unsure of which taxi companies are acceptable, inquire at the airport information desk, hotel concierge desk, shop keeper, restaurant personnel or program staff. They might also be able to help with communication problems you may encounter. Have a local write your destination for the taxi driver to read.
- Plan ahead how to get home before you go out.
- Take a business card with the phone number of a reputable minicab or taxi company, phone for the taxi when you need it.
- Do not travel alone. When possible, travel in groups.
- Calling for a taxi is the safest way to travel, especially at night.
- Try not to let anyone overhear you ordering a taxi. If they hear your name and destination, they may pretend to be the taxi you ordered.
- If you have ordered a taxi, wait for the driver should approach you. Do not approach a car that you think is your taxi.
- Ask the driver the name and destination he has been given to check he is your driver. Don't get into a taxi you haven't ordered.
- If you must hail a taxi, spot one from a well known and reliable company. This requires some advanced knowledge of taxi companies in the area.
- Before getting into the taxi, make sure the driver agrees to take you to your destination.
- When you get into the taxi, note the company name, code number displayed, driver's name, ID and photograph if possible.
- Do not accept rides from drivers who randomly approach you.
- Sit in the back seat.

### **Bus & Minivan Safety Checklist**

- Be aware of traffic patterns and local road culture.
- Wait for the bus in a safe place – away from the road.
- Whenever possible, avoid overcrowded buses and minivans.
- Be alert for reckless driving (e.g. speeding, inattention to driving, apparent drowsiness, disregard for signage and signals).
- Insist that the driver be responsible or get off at the first possible safe opportunity.
- If you feel you are at risk, speak up!
- After you get off the bus take several steps out of the danger zone.
- If you drop something near the bus, tell the driver before you pick it up.
- Stand several steps away from the road while waiting for the bus.

- After getting driver's attention, cross the street in front of the bus. Never go behind the bus.
- Stay seated at all times.
- Avoid night travel, especially in rural areas.

## **Personal Security While Traveling**

### **General Safety Tips**

- Notify your family and friends of your departure and return dates, but don't otherwise publicize your travel or vacation plans. Leave contact numbers with appropriate mission personnel.
- Check plane, train, and bus times before you travel.
- Sit near other people or near aisles or doors. Learn the location of emergency alarms and exits.
- Stay awake and alert when using public transportation.
- Consider purchasing special clothing or accessories to hide your passport, money, or credit cards. Keep the majority of your funds in travelers checks and hidden; carry some in your wallet or handbag. Use a money clip. If you are robbed, you may lose the money in the clip but will retain important credit cards and documents.
- Keep valuables out of sight and luggage close at hand. If carrying a handbag, keep it in front of you, closed, with the fastening toward your body. Keep a wallet in your front pants pocket.
- Let go if your bag is snatched.
- Do some research on the area you are visiting. Talk to your security officer or consular colleagues regarding travel advisories or warnings.
- When traveling, dress casually; dress down where appropriate. Be aware of local customs.
- Don't wear excess jewelry. Reduce wallet and purse contents, particularly cards denoting affiliations, memberships, accounts, etc.
- At airports, proceed through security checks and go to the boarding area as quickly as possible. These areas are usually the most secure in the airport.
- In any crowded situation, be aware of any crowding or jostling, even if it appears innocent. This is often a ploy by pickpockets to distract you.
- Be very careful any time you use a telephone calling card. Fraudulent uses of these cards are on the rise. Look for people observing your card or your fingers as you dial your code. Avoid being heard giving the number to local telephone operators.

### **Additional Security Tips for Hotels in Foreign Countries**

- Check with the Regional Security Officer at the U.S. Embassy for a list of hotels utilized by officials visiting the area.
- If traveling abroad consider making reservations using your employer's street address, without identifying the company, and using your personal credit card. Again, the less known about your travel itinerary, and who you represent, the better.
- Request information about parking arrangements if anticipating renting an automobile.
- Be aware that credit card information has been compromised in the past. Always audit monthly credit card statements to ensure that unauthorized use has not been made of your account.
- The most vulnerable part of your journey is traveling between the point of debarkation/embarkation and the hotel. Do not linger or wander unnecessarily in the parking lot, indoor garage or public space around the hotel - be alert for suspicious persons and behavior. Watch for distractions that are intentionally staged to setup a pickpocket, luggage theft or purse snatch.
- Stay with your luggage until it is brought into the lobby, or placed into the taxi or limo.

- Consider using the bellman. Luggage in the "care, custody and control" of the hotel causes the hotel to be liable for your property. Protect claim checks; they are your evidence!
- Keep in mind though that there are limits of liability created by states and countries to protect hoteliers. Personal travel documents, lap tops, jewelry, and other valuables and sensitive documents in excess of \$1,000 in value should be hand carried and personally protected.
- If you arrive by auto, park as close to a hotel access point as possible, and park in a lighted area. Remove all property from the car interior and place it in the trunk. Avoid leaving valuables or personal documents in the glove compartment. Prior to leaving the security of the vehicle, note any suspicious persons or behavior.
- If using valet service, leave only the ignition key, and take trunk, house, or office keys with you. Often, valets are not employees of the hotel and work for contract firms.
- Parking garages are difficult to secure. Avoid dimly lit garages that are not patrolled and do not have security telephones or intercoms.
- Female travelers should consider asking for an escort to their vehicles whether parked in the lot or garage.
- In some countries, your passport may be temporarily held by the hotel for review by the police or other authorities. Obtain its return at the earliest possible time.
- Be aware of persons in the hotel lobby who may have unusual interest in your arrival.
- If carrying your luggage, keep it within view or touch. One recommendation is to position luggage against your leg during registration but place a briefcase or a purse on the desk or counter in front of you.
- Ground floor rooms which open to a pool area or beach with sliding glass doors and window access are considered vulnerable. Depending upon the situation, area, and security coverage, exercise a higher level of security if assigned a first floor room.
- It is suggested that female travelers request rooms that are away from the elevator landing and stairwells. This is to avoid being caught by surprise by persons exiting the elevator with you or hiding in the stairwell.
- Always accept bellman assistance upon check-in. Allow the bellman to open the room, turn lights on, check the room to ensure that it is vacant and ready for your stay. Before dismissing the bellman, always inspect the door lock, locks on sliding glass doors, optical viewer, privacy latch or chain, guest room safes, dead bolt lock on interconnecting suite door, and telephone. If a discrepancy is found, request a room change.
- Ask where the nearest fire stairwell is located. Make a mental note which direction you must turn and approximately how many steps there are to the closest fire stairwell. In the event of a fire, there is frequently dense smoke and no lighting.
- Note how hotel staff is uniformed and identified. Many "pretext" crimes occur by persons misrepresenting themselves as hotel employees on house telephones to gain access to guest rooms. Avoid permitting a person into the guest room unless you have confirmed that the person is authorized to enter. This can be verified by using the optical viewer and by calling the front desk.

## **General Travel Tips**

### **Sexual Assault Prevention**

- Be alert. Don't assume that you are always safe. Think about your safety everywhere. Your best protection is avoiding dangerous situations.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any situation, leave.
- Always walk, drive, and park your car in well-lit areas.
- Walk confidently at a steady pace on the side of the street facing traffic.

- Walk close to the curb. Avoid doorways, bushes, and alleys.
- Wear clothes and shoes that allow freedom of movement.
- Walk to your car with keys in your hand.
- If you have car trouble, raise the hood and stay inside your car. If a stranger wants to help, have him or her call for help. Don't leave your car.
- Keep your car doors locked and never pick up hitchhikers.
- Make sure all windows and doors in your home are locked, especially if you are home alone.
- Never give the impression that you are home alone if strangers telephone or come to the door.
- If a stranger asks to use your phone, have him wait outside while you make the call.
- If you come home and find a door or window open or signs of forced entry, don't go in. Go to the nearest phone and call the local law enforcement authorities.

### **Basic Health and Safety**

- **What to Know about Your Country:** Learn all you can about the health and safety issues of the countries you plan to visit. This includes reading about the cultural and political climate of those countries, as well as learning about how others view people from your country, race, ethnic group, religion, gender and sexual orientation.
- **Infectious Diseases and Inoculations:** Find out about the infectious diseases endemic in countries to which you will be traveling, and get the appropriate shots and pills, and take the appropriate medications with you if your doctor thinks it's necessary. Find out about any potential side-effects of shots and pills that you may take.
- **Physicals and Check-ups:** Get a complete physical, eye exam and dental check-up before going abroad. The quality of dental and medical care may be different in your country and/or more expensive than similar care would be in the United States.
- **Can You Drink the Water?:** Find out if water is safe to drink in the countries to which you will be traveling. Purify unsafe water before you drink it. Make sure water bottles come sealed when you buy them. Remember that ice can also be unsafe, as well as the water you use to brush your teeth.
- **Food Safety:** Poor refrigeration, undercooked meat, and roadside/outdoor vendors could pose problems related to food contamination. If you get diarrhea or food poisoning, remember to drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. As with any illness, consider seeing a doctor if your condition worsens. Give your body time to adjust to new types of foods you will be eating.
- **Laws and Codes of Conduct:** Make yourself aware of both the rules and regulations of the study abroad program sponsor, and the local laws and customs of the countries which you will be visiting. Understand that you will not only have to conform to the legal system of the country you will be visiting, but also obey the codes of conduct required of program participants.
- **Mental and Physical Health:** Consider your own mental and physical health issues when applying for a study abroad program, and make all your necessary health information available to the program's administrators so they can assist you with any special needs, or advise you on the risks you might face. Study abroad may include both physical and mental challenges for students.
- **Prescriptions:** Get a doctor's signed prescription for any medication you have to bring abroad. Some prescriptions may need to be translated if you wish to fill them abroad. Include your glasses or contact lens prescription. Bring an extra pair of glasses.
- **First-Aid Kit:** Consider a well-stocked first-aid kit as a first line of defense. Some items to include are: sunscreen, bandages, flashlight, sterile pads, insect repellent, adhesive tape, aspirin, antacid, anti-diarrhea tablets, anti-malarial medication, extra bottled water, feminine protection, condoms, rubber gloves, etc.

- **Fitness and Exercise:** Try to get fit in the time you have before departing overseas. A healthy body can help you to fight off illness and recover faster if you do get sick. Also, try to stay fit while abroad, even though it may be harder to follow a structured workout routine.
- **Walking:** Get a good pair of comfortable walking shoes. Without access to a car or public transportation abroad, you may have to do quite a bit of walking. Break in your shoes before you go.
- **Emergency Contacts:** Keep the program staff and an emergency contact at home well informed of your whereabouts and activities and provide these people with copies of your important travel documents (i.e. passport, visa, plane tickets, traveler's checks, and prescriptions).
- **Air Travel:** When you travel by air, drink a lot of non-alcoholic fluids, stay away from caffeine, eat light, and stretch often to avoid jetlag. Many airlines are now required to show an in-flight video of stretching exercises you can do on the plane in order to avoid the potential formation of blood clots, which can be caused by cabin pressure. A direct flight is usually easier for most travelers, but flights broken up by stops can also lessen jet lag.
- **Transportation:** Accidents involving in-country travel, whether by air, bus, train, taxi, car, etc., are a major cause of injury to students abroad. It is important to understand what the safe modes of travel are abroad.
  - **Bus:** Since it is the cheapest way to travel (though rather tedious), travel by bus is often a very popular choice for students and travelers. However, since it is so slow, you may prefer to take the train. Often, if you can't find service to a particular location on national or regional buslines, local service should be able to take you to your desired destination.
  - **Train/Metro:** Travel by train is usually much faster than by bus, and can be a better option if you want to see more places in a short amount of time. You may want to avoid traveling by train alone at night, particularly in more urban areas. In major cities especially, you will find the metro system (where available) to be the most convenient form of transportation to move about the city, although beware of pickpockets.
  - **Air:** Air travel can be a good value compared to a long bus ride. If you know of discount airfare websites, you can find tickets for less than a train ride would be. Especially if road travel is unsafe due to poor road conditions, and if train travel is too slow for your needs, then air travel can be a safe and pleasant option.
  - **Cars (Driving):** While renting a car while studying while abroad can be a great way to see the countryside, it can also be a very stressful and dangerous way to travel. In countries where driving laws are significantly different than in the U.S., such as the UK or Hong Kong where drivers travel on the left side of the road or in other countries where you would experience a completely different driving environment, you should consider taking another form of transportation - especially if you feel hesitant at all about driving. U.S. driver's licenses are valid in most countries for up to 12 months. Insurance is required for all vehicles, including rental vehicles. You should obtain full coverage insurance when renting vehicles in any country - to make it easier, most rental places will arrange this beforehand. If a driver is involved in a vehicle accident resulting in damages or injuries to another party, the driver may be detained by local authorities until a settlement is arranged with the injured party. Furthermore, depending upon the extent of damages or injuries to the other party, you may face charges filed by the country's judicial authorities.
- **Alcohol and Drugs:** Use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad can increase the risk of accident and injury. Many study abroad accidents and injury are related to the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad. Violating drug laws abroad may result in very serious consequences. In some countries, being found guilty of violating drug laws can result in consequences as serious as death.

- **Setting an Example:** Set a good example. Remember you are like an ambassador for your University. Behave in a way that is respectful of others' rights and well-being and encourage others to do the same.

### **Risk Factors and Strategies to Reduce Risk**

- Most of the incidents resulting in injury or death of students while participating in study abroad involve:
  - travel/traffic accidents
  - use and abuse of drugs or alcohol
  - sexual harassment and assault
  - crime/petty theft
  - mental health issues/stress
  - diseases and illnesses that exist in the host country
- **Precautions When Accepting Food and Drink:** Be cautious about accepting drinks (alcoholic or non-alcoholic) from a stranger. Use the same caution you would have about accepting a drink from a stranger in the United States while you are overseas. Also be cautious about accepting food from a stranger.
- **Risk Upon Arrival:** Travelers, especially those having just arrived abroad, are often targets of crime and at higher risk of harm, because they:
  - Are unfamiliar with their surroundings
  - Might not speak the local language well
  - Are clearly recognizable as foreigners
  - Have not yet learned the social norms or unwritten rules of conduct
  - Are eager to get to know new people and the local culture
  - Are naive to the intentions of people around them
  - Are carrying all their valuables with them when they first step off the plane, train, or boat
- **Keeping In Control:** In addition to the circumstances involved with being new in a foreign country, which are often beyond one's immediate control, there are many situations that students can control. Some controllable factors that place students at greatest risk include:
  - Being out after midnight
  - Being alone at night in an isolated area
  - Being in a known high crime area
  - Sleeping in an unlocked place
  - Being out after a local curfew
  - Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- **Verbal and Non-verbal Communication:** Non-verbal communication (like body language and hand gestures) considered harmless in the U.S. may be offensive to people in other countries. The list of gestures and phrases considered rude in other countries can grow beyond the obvious.
- **Sexually Transmitted Diseases:** Keep yourself free from sexually transmitted diseases by using protection (like condoms or abstinence). Also, remember that "no" may not always be interpreted as "no" in other countries. Inform yourself about the types of diseases prevalent in the area in which you are traveling.
- **International Sources of Information:** Inform yourself as much as possible about your new environment, making use of as many different sources as possible - online, in the library, on television and radio news programs, and in the paper. Don't limit yourself to U.S. sources. Instead, contrast the U.S. information with that provided by other countries.
- **Understanding Locals:** Beyond tuning into yourself, make it a point to try to understand what locals are communicating to you, how they feel about you and about U.S. citizens in general, how you are fitting with their values, and how well you understand them. Obviously a stronger grasp of

the native language will help you with these things, but even knowing a few essential phrases can be immensely beneficial.

- **How to Dress:** It is often best to dress conservatively - by local standards, so you can't be identified on sight as a tourist or a U.S. citizen.
- **Jewelry and Other Valuables:** Be cautious with how you display valuables (does it look like you're flaunting wealth?). Leave your good jewelry at home, and keep money in a safe place like a money belt or hidden pouch under your clothes.
- **Becoming Aware of Your Surroundings:** You should be aware of your surroundings, remembering to:
  - Pay attention to what people around you are saying
  - Find out which areas of the city are less safe than others
  - Know which hours of night are considered more dangerous
  - Stay and walk only in well-lit areas
  - Avoid being alone in unfamiliar neighborhoods
  - Know where to get help (police station, fire station, phones, stores, etc.)
  - Do not touch suspicious items like letters or packages mailed to you from someone you don't know
  - Know what is "normal" and "not normal" to see on a daily basis in the areas you frequent
  - Do not respond to explosions or gunfire by going to a window; seek cover away from windows and exterior walls
- **Political Rallies:** Avoid political rallies, which can increase tensions and emotions or breed angry mobs for which a U.S. citizen may serve as a scapegoat.
- **Political Conversations:** Try not to engage in conversations about contentious political issues with locals and avoid retaliating against hostile or bigoted remarks about Americans.

## Special Issues

- **Women**

Unwanted attention can range from a mild nuisance to a serious threat of danger. Acceptable treatment of women in your host country may be very different from the kind of treatment acceptable in the United States. Also, the way women interact with men in the United States may not be as socially acceptable in other countries. What's considered "being friendly" in the United States can be considered flirting or a sexual invitation in other countries. Even reacting (positively or negatively) to un-wanted attention can serve to egg-on the other person. Personal space and boundaries may also be different in other countries, so make sure to clearly establish behavior that shows you're not interested.

In television and movies, the media tends to portray U.S. women as promiscuous. Simply smiling or saying hello to the opposite sex may be all that is needed to confirm this unflattering stereotype in their minds. To avoid trouble and unwanted attention, ask local women you meet and your program's administrators about what is considered "appropriate" behavior and dress for women. Dressing conservatively and traveling in groups are always safe bets. Although it is important to learn to adapt to a foreign culture, that doesn't mean you should have to compromise your own sense of security and dignity. If you feel you can't adapt to your host country's sexual culture, you may have to be more selective about the location of your program.

- **Minorities (Ethnic and Religious)**

You may not be considered an ethnic, or religious majority in the United States, but by going abroad you become, in a sense, a minority. There might not be a lot of U.S. students studying in the area you will be, so, in that sense, you are a novelty—someone new and different who stands

out from the locals. In some cases, your outward appearance can also make you stand out, especially if the country's population is very homogeneous. Sometimes the locals' curiosity, interest, ignorance or misunderstanding of you can be unpleasant. If a comment offends you, try to be tactful with your response, or if you are very upset, leave the room. Remember that cultural and ethnic sensitivity is not as strong abroad as it is in the United States, and some comments are simply made out of ignorance, not malice.

Political turmoil or lack of tolerance can make some ethnic and religious groups a target for mistreatment or even violence in many countries. Political rallies and certain dates like anniversaries of historic events also often spur ethnic and religious conflicts in many countries. Certain hate crimes may not even be considered crimes in your host country. With regard to religion, the risk or censure you attract depends on your level of religious involvement abroad. In others where you will be studying have been attacked for practicing the religion you practice, any signs of your religious affiliation may put you at risk as well.

Ethnic or religious issues shouldn't be a negative factor of your study abroad experience. That's why it's important to do a little research ahead of time to survey the national sentiment and current events of your host country.

- **Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Students**  
It is important for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender (LGBT) students to be aware that the way sexual identities are defined and understood will vary by country and culture. In some countries, even modern ones, homosexual sex itself can result in severe state-sanctioned punishment up to and including the death penalty. It is usually not homosexuality that brings about such punishments, but rather the sex act. You might want to consider how a possible threat of discrimination or punishment might affect your experience or activities in your host country. Generally, acceptance and tolerance of LGBT issues is increasing in some parts of the world, but some countries and individuals remain intolerant. Make sure to research the prevailing sentiment toward LGBT issues abroad, as well as the laws related to them. If you don't want to compromise on your lifestyle or if you are concerned that your sexual orientation may be an issue, then you may have to be selective in where you travel.
- **Students with Disabilities**  
Students with disabilities abroad can also be the victims of prejudice and stereotyping. The disabled report being stared at, ignored, un-assisted, and/ or talked down to more frequently abroad than they tend to be in the United States. In many countries, there are no standards or requirements for providing access for the disabled. Wheelchair ramps, handicapped parking spaces, braille signs, and other aides may be non-existent in parts of the host country, especially rural areas. In addition to a lack of services provided to the physically disabled, there may also be a lack of services provided to those with a learning disability, those with a psychological or emotional need, or those who are mentally challenged. If you need to make special arrangements abroad, it is a good idea to inquire far in advance. Your program's staff abroad may require some time in order to facilitate your needs. Even though you request that your special needs be met, it may be impossible for your program's staff abroad to assist you.
- **Americans**  
The foreign policy of the United States does not always sit well with citizens of foreign countries. In some cases, Americans living abroad can be targets of the frustrations of these individuals. Consider the nature of the political climate and relations between the United States and your

destination, as well as the other countries you plan to visit. There are some steps you can take to avoid being targeted for politically motivated crime or anti-U.S. crime in general. Try to assimilate your style of dress and mannerisms as much as possible into the local norms. "Dressing like a U.S. citizen" (or any way conspicuously different from the local look) makes it easier to identify you as "the other" or an "outsider" and can make you a target. Some common stereotypes about Americans portray Americans as: loud, inconsiderate, ignorant, rude, rich, arrogant, cheap, greedy, lazy, promiscuous, overweight, English-only speakers, etc. To avoid reinforcing such stereotypes, remember you are like an ambassador of the United States and its culture; as an ambassador abroad, it is your job to respect others and to act responsibly.

**FOR ADDITIONAL TIPS ON SAFE TRAVEL ABROAD VISIT THE FOLLOWING WEB SITES:**

**Overseas Security Advisory Council - Security Guidelines for American Families Living Abroad**

<https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=30022>

**Overseas Security Advisory Council - Personal Security Guidelines for the American Business Traveler Overseas**

<https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=30030>

**U.S. Department of State Tips for Safe Travel Abroad**

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips\\_1232.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html)

**U.S. Department of State Current Travel Warnings**

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/tw/tw\\_1764.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html)

**U.S. Department of State Counselor Information Sheets**

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html)

**U.S. Department of State International Travel Safety Information for Students**

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/safety/safety\\_2836.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/safety/safety_2836.html)

## **Student Checklist for Travel Abroad**

This checklist is meant to be exhaustive. You may find that not all steps are needed or may apply to your specific travel plans. Consider these steps when preparing for your study abroad program.

### **Pre-Departure Planning**

- I have compared ticket prices offered by travel agents, student agencies and websites.
- I have a valid passport and visa.
- I know whether or not my program requires me to show proof of insurance, provide a doctor's letter or confirmation of sufficient funds.
- I have made multiple copies of all important travel documents.
- I have registered to obtain absentee ballots so I can vote in U.S. elections while abroad.
- I have set up power of attorney.
- I have established how I'm going to pay my outstanding U.S. bills while in my host country

### **How Foreign Laws Apply to You**

- I am familiar with the basic social laws of the countries to which I will be traveling, including laws related to drug and alcohol use.
- I am familiar with how the legal system works in each country I plan to visit.
- I know the location of the U.S. Embassy in each country I plan to visit.
- I have registered/will register with the U.S. Embassy in my host country.
- I have proper insurance and a personal lawyer in case I should need legal counsel.

### **Methods of Communication While Abroad**

- I know all the important telephone and fax numbers and addresses for my program's office both in the U.S. and abroad, including emergency after-hours numbers.
- I know the address and telephone number for my residence abroad.
- I know how my calling card plan works and how to use my card to call home.
- I know where to buy a cell phone abroad in case I need one.
- If I bring my PDA, its wireless service will work abroad.
- I have created an internationally accessible e-mail account address.
- All of my emergency contacts both in the U.S. and abroad have all of my contact information, and I have theirs.
- I know how the mail service operates abroad (efficiency, costs, etc.) and what to expect when mailing items.
- I have a list of everyone to whom I have given out my contact information.
- I have asked those to whom I have given my address to tell me before they mail me anything.

### **Housing**

- I have made a list of the pros and cons of each type of housing available to me abroad.
- I have asked a study abroad administrator if I can change my place of residence abroad in the event that things don't work out.
- After making a list of pros and cons, I have decided which type of housing suits my needs best and why.
- I realize that it may take time for me to adjust to the Rules, Privacy, Sharing, Telephone, Meals, Language and Social Network aspects of the type of housing I have chosen.

### **Packing**

- I know how much luggage my airline allows me to check and to take on board my flight.
- I know what my airline permits me to carry in my carry-ons.
- I have researched the weather conditions over various seasons in the region of my host country where I will be.
- I remembered to pack all important travel documents in my carry-on, not my checked bags.
- I made a list of items I intend to purchase once I arrive abroad, rather than pack them.
- I made an itemized list of everything I packed in my suitcases in case they are lost or stolen and I need to make an insurance claim.
- If I have decided to ship some items, I have contacted someone in my host country to insure pick-up and/or payment for these items upon arrival.

### **Expectations**

- I know I will have to adapt my routine and schedule to life abroad.
- I have researched what the general quality of facilities like hospitals, restaurants, public transportation, payphones, etc. is like abroad.
- I know what modern conveniences my host country offers (i.e. internet hookups, supermarket chains, name brand stores, microwaves, cell phone service, heated classrooms, etc.).
- I have asked what kind of restroom facilities and toilets are standard abroad.
- I know whether or not I will be living in a co-ed dorm or apartment while abroad, and if my program permits co-ed living.

### **Medical Care and Insurance**

- I am familiar with the health care system of the country where I will be studying, including the quality of facilities and the cost of services.
- I know the location of the nearest hospital to my abroad residence.
- I know what my insurance policy does and does not cover.
- I will be provided with a translator if needed during a doctor visit or hospital stay.
- I have an emergency contact in the U.S. and abroad.
- I have a first aid kit.
- I know how to refill needed prescriptions abroad.

### **Basic Health and Safety**

- Before leaving, I have gotten a complete physical from my doctor.
- I have received all necessary immunizations required/recommended for entry to the countries I will visit, and I know where to obtain other inoculations abroad if needed later.
- I know who the emergency contact will be at the U.S. and in my host country.
- I know who my emergency contact will be at home.
- I have asked whether or not the drinking water is safe to drink while abroad.
- I know what precautions to take when eating local food.
- I have researched where to buy food that suits my dietary needs/restrictions (i.e. for vegetarians, diabetics, etc...)
- I know how extensive, safe and reliable the public transportation system is in my host country.
- I am aware of the laws and codes of conduct that are likely to impact me.
- I understand that the use of alcohol and drugs increases my risk of accident and injury.

### **Risk Factors and Strategies to Reduce Risk**

- I know which non-verbal behaviors are considered inappropriate/rude and which are commonly used (certain hand gestures, greeting by bowing, kissing or shaking hands, etc.).
- I know which areas are considered unsafe in the cities I will visit.
- I know which forms of public transportation are safest to use.
- I know where to get help if I need it.
- I have a small flashlight to carry with me at night.
- I have only given out my mailing address to people I know, and those people will inform me before they send me any mail/packages.
- I am aware of the prevailing local attitudes towards, and local laws dealing with, sexual harassment and sexual assault.
- I am aware of any travel advisories issued by the U.S. State Department for the countries to which I will be traveling.

### **Special Issues**

- I am aware of the prevailing local sentiment towards people of my cultural background, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, etc.
- I am aware of how past and current U.S. policy has affected/affects the countries where I will visit.
- I know how to avoid confrontations over politics/religion, and how to avoid provoking unwanted attention by not flaunting my "American-ness".
- I am aware of the prevailing national sentiment towards the U.S. and U.S. citizens in the countries I will visit.

### **Crisis Management**

- I am familiar with my program's Emergency Action Plan.

<http://www.auburn.edu/academic/international/crisis/index.htm>

- In the event of serious injury or death, I have made my wishes clear to family in the U.S., and to my program director abroad.
- I am aware of what my program, the Embassy and the Consulate can and cannot do to assist me in the event of a crisis.
- I have been provided with comprehensive information from my program, and I have shared this information with parents/guardians/family members.
- I have more than one way to keep in touch with home while abroad (i.e. through e-mail, calling card, fax, etc...)
- I can identify the three phases of crisis, as well as the physical and emotional symptoms that may affect me during each phase.
- I know which active steps I will take in a crisis in order to make myself feel calmer and safer.
- I recognize the fact that I may experience emotional side-effects from crisis, and that my emotional responses to crisis are normal.

### **Adjustments and Culture Shock**

- I am already familiar with some major cultural differences between home and the country in which I will study (i.e.: religion, language, laws)?
- I understand that it is normal to experience culture shock, including feelings of anxiety, depression and frustration.
- If my depression does not go away, I know where to get help (i.e.: a student counselor)?
- I expect to have both good days and bad when learning to overcome my culture shock, and I will be patient with myself as I learn to adapt.
- I know that I am not alone in how I feel.
- I will try not to be negative or overly critical of another country's culture. Instead, I will look for the positives that a culture possesses.
- I will make an effort to meet and make friends with locals rather than just hanging around other Americans.
- I will not let terrorist threats turn my culture shock into culture fear.
- Upon return home, I will be patient with myself again as I experience reverse culture shock. (This includes trying not to be overly critical of the U.S. just because being home is not like being abroad.)

### **Airport Safety, Duties and Customs**

- I have all of my identification and travel documents in an assessable, yet secure, location.
- I did not accept anything from anyone before boarding my flight.
- I packed my bags myself and know exactly what's in them.
- My bags never left my sight or supervision before they were checked in.
- I filled out all necessary declaration forms.
- I was honest in declaring everything I am bringing into or out of the U.S.?
- I was careful to avoid carrying any item that be considered illegal in the U.S. or the host country, or may cause me to be suspected of smuggling

### **Reverse Culture Shock**

- I am already familiar with some major cultural differences between home and my host country.
- I understand that it is normal to experience reverse culture shock, including feelings of anxiety, depression and frustration towards home and the United States.
- If my depression does not go away, I know where to get help (i.e.: a student counselor)?

- I expect to have both good days and bad when learning to overcome my reverse culture shock, and I will be patient with myself as I learn to adapt back to life in the United States.
- I know that I am not alone in how I feel.
- I will try not to be negative or overly critical of United States or British culture. Instead, I will look for the positives that a culture possesses.
- Upon return home, I will be patient with myself again as I experience reverse culture shock. (This includes trying not to be overly critical of the U.S. just because being home is not like being abroad.)