ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO STUDY ABROAD

FALL 2006 AND ACADEMIC YEAR 2006-2007

Colorado
University of Colorado at Boulder
STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS
Millions of Americans travel abroad every year and encounter no difficulties. However, U.S. embassies and consulates assist nearly 200,000 people each year who are victims of crime, accident, or illness, or whose family and friends need to contact them in an emergency.

When an emergency happens, or if natural disaster, terrorism, or civil unrest strikes during your foreign travel, the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate can be your source of assistance and information. By registering your trip, you help them locate you when you might need them the most. Registration is voluntary and costs nothing. It should be a big part of your travel planning and security.

U.S. citizens can access the internet-based registration system (IBRS) either through a link on [http://travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) or directly at [https://travelregistration.state.gov/](https://travelregistration.state.gov/)

**Living and Traveling Abroad Safely**

Here are some basic precautions for your traveling safety and convenience. Once again, travel to another country is not inherently dangerous. But no matter where you go, you inevitably stand out as a stranger and could be targeted by local criminals. You can’t rely on your “street smarts” like you do at home - you don’t know enough about the new environment. Here is our best advice:

**BE INFORMED**
- Read newspapers and listen to TV or radio news; know what’s going on in the world.
- Check with program staff before traveling to get travel advisories; read up on the customs and political situation of every country you plan to visit.
- Talk to international students and program alumni from places you intend to visit before you go.

**WATCH AND LEARN FROM THE LOCALS.**
- If they don’t go out after 9 p.m. without an escort, then you shouldn’t either.
- Ask questions of your host family, fellow dorm residents, or your program director. If they don’t make eye contact with strangers, you shouldn’t either.

**BE INCONSPICUOUS.**
- Don’t look too “American.”
- Don’t speak loudly and draw attention to yourself.
- Learn a few basic language phrases for each country where you plan to travel.
- Avoid looking like an American tourist; don’t wear t-shirts, sweatshirts, or baseball caps with American logos. Don’t wear your camera around your neck. Remember that your map can give you away. Especially in cities with lots of tourists, look at maps and metro guides before leaving the hotel.

**BE AWARE** at all times of your surroundings.
- Use the precautions that are customary in any major city in the world today.
- Travel with a friend.
- Plan your route and walk confidently.
- If you are being followed, feel threatened, or you are lost, go into a store, restaurant, or other public area.
- You know what feels comfortable and what doesn’t. If your instincts tell you a situation is “not right,” trust them and move along.

**USE COMMON SENSE.**
- Use your common sense and your street skills.
- If you wouldn’t camp out in a city park at home, don’t do it abroad.
- Avoid walking alone at night. Stay in well-populated, well-trafficked areas.
- Be especially cautious if you have been drinking.
- Avoid arguments.

**STAY HEALTHY.**
- Eat well and get sufficient rest.
- If you become ill, get proper care. Don’t hesitate to tell your host family or onsite director if you are ill and don’t be afraid to visit a doctor or hospital just because you don’t speak the language fluently.

**DON’T USE ILLEGAL DRUGS.**
- Each year, 2,500 Americans are arrested overseas. One third of the arrests are on drug-related charges. Many assumed that as U.S. citizens that they could not be arrested.
- For more information on this, see the following section “Alcohol and Illegal Drugs.”

**GUARD PERSONAL BELONGINGS.**
- Pickpockets can be extremely adept - don’t carry
your passport or money in a hip pocket, open purse, or outside pocket on your backpack.
- Pickpockets mingle widely in tourist crowds, especially at airports, travel agencies, and American Express offices.
- A money belt or neck pouch is a good idea.
- If you need to sleep on a bus or train, use your pack as your pillow.
- On crowded city subways, carry your daypack in front of you.
- Always have a hand or foot in a loop or strap of your luggage when you set it down to avoid having it snatched while you’re not looking.

PACKING VALUABLES.
- Don’t carry valuables in a backpack, never leave bags unattended, and never carry large amounts of cash.
- Take and use a lock.
- Take only as much luggage as you can carry and never let it out of your sight.
- Do not pack valuables (passports, documents, contact lenses, medications, and electrical equipment) in checked luggage.

ORGANIZE YOUR FUNDS.
- Organize your funds into two separate packs, each with a credit card and currency. When in-country one of these packs should be left at your residence as a back-up.
- Keep the cash you are using separate from the rest of the money you are carrying when you travel.
- Try to avoid reaching into your money belt in public places.

COPY DOCUMENTS.
- Make two copies of all your important documents (passport, visa, traveler’s checks, and travel itinerary). Keep these in a safe place, leaving one copy in the U.S.
- When you don’t need your passport, carry the copy.
- If you are robbed, get a police report documenting any losses.
- Bring 4 extra photos in the event that you need to replace your passport or visas.

AIRPORT SECURITY.
- At airports be prepared for lengthy check-ins since thorough security checks take time.
- Carry-on luggage will be X-rayed and possibly hand-searched. Do not accept packages from people you do not know well or carry packages for other travelers.

JET LAG.
- You should expect to feel jet lag on arrival overseas. It will take a few days for your system to adjust to the time and climate changes, so pace yourself.
- Get plenty of sleep before your trip and drink lots of fluids before and during the flight to prevent dehydration.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol and eat light meals on the plane.

TRAFFIC AND THE ROAD.
- According to the Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT), the single greatest cause of death and serious injury abroad is road accidents. These far exceed deaths resulting from disease, violence or terrorism.
- Avoid car or bus travel at night.
- Use a seatbelt.
- We strongly recommend that you not own or operate a motor vehicle of any kind while abroad. Driving regulations and habits are different from the U.S. - driving overseas can be very dangerous. Your family’s liability insurance may not be valid abroad.
- Pedestrians are also at risk, so be especially careful crossing the street. Never assume that you have the right of way.

Pay particular attention to the following, which are common on the roads in many countries:
- Passing on the right and cutting in front of other vehicles from the right side.
- Unexpected stops or turns without signaling.
- Stopping in unexpected locations to pick up or drop off passengers, including main highway entrance ramps, intersections and along major highways.
- Trucks parked at night without lights on the highway rather than on the side of the road.
- Disabled vehicles parked without warning signs.

DO NOT HITCHHIKE.

LEARN THE WORD FOR “HELP.”

AVOID DEMONSTRATIONS, especially in politically volatile countries.

LEAVE YOUR TRAVEL ITINERARY WITH FRIENDS.
- Always tell someone where you are going.
- Make a list of important telephone numbers and addresses in the locations you will visit. Write down the telephone number of the nearest embassy or consulate.
- Leave a copy with your contact person.

**CELL PHONE.**
- If you use a cell phone, check to be sure it can be used in the countries where you travel.
- If not, buy a phone card to use for emergencies in each country you enter.

**SPECIAL CAUTION TO WOMEN.**
- Become aware of those situations where you might be harassed or molested.
- You not only have the normal burden of sexism, but in many places you have to contend with the stereotype that Western women are promiscuous.
- Observe the behavior of the local women.
- Find out about non-verbal messages (eye contact, tone, gestures, and dress) to avoid or adopt.
- If you are verbally harassed on the street, the best path is to ignore it unless you are touched or your safety is threatened.
- Again, be very careful about alcohol consumption. Women who have been drinking leave themselves more vulnerable to sexual assault.

**Socializing Safely**

A truly wonderful part of travel abroad is making friends with people from different cultures. It can be exhilarating to exchange ideas and find common ground with people who speak a different language and come from a different background.

However, there can be risks because of cultural differences and misperceptions about Americans.
- Some behavior that is acceptable at home may be viewed as provocative overseas.
- Foreign tones of voice, gestures, and ways of touching may cause Americans to feel threatened by people who mean no harm.
- What is seen in the U.S. as casual dating may be seen in some countries like one step away from a lifetime commitment.

**What to do?**
- Take time to learn about cultural norms that govern relationship roles and dating.
- Use discretion and common sense in your behavior and in the clothing that you wear.
- Strive to blend in and thus avoid becoming a target for harassment.
- Don’t lose control by drinking too much or taking illegal drugs.
- It is usually best to avoid making eye contact with strangers on the street.

- Above all, be aware of the unconscious messages you may give out through your posture, gestures, tone of voice, clothing, and eye contact.
- If you find yourself in an encounter that makes you nervous, don’t worry about being the ugly American. State your views clearly and get out of the situation. Ignore catcalls and move purposefully.

As for relationships (both male/female and same sex) you may not know enough at first about appropriate behavior. Given the potential additional handicaps of language problems or unfair stereotypes, you could unwittingly set yourself up for trouble. Add alcohol or drugs to cloud your judgment and you could find yourself in a dangerous situation, including the potential for sexual assault.

Talk to locals who you trust to find out more about appropriate behavior. To quote a student writing in *Transitions Abroad*, “The fact is that sex and love are problematic in every culture, but how they are problematic varies greatly from country to country. And when you throw in linguistic challenges, the potential for disappointment or disaster goes off the charts.” (July/Aug 99, p. 88)

The bottom line is that you should enjoy your time abroad, but always use your head. If you temper curiosity with good sense, your trip will be a safe and enriching experience.

For more information on personal safety abroad, here are a few useful websites:

U.S. State Department website for registering travel plans and residency abroad:
https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs

U.S State Department Travel Warnings and Consular Information Sheets:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html

U.S. State Department Background Notes:
http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html

U.S. State Department "Tips for Students"
http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1219.html

Journeywoman Online Magazine:
http://www.journeywoman.com/
Disability Travel and Recreation Resources:
http://www.makoa.org/travel.htm

Gay and Lesbian Travel Guide and Resources:
http://www.gaymart.com/5persorg/6city/targ.html

European Road Signs and Conventions:
http://www.travlang.com/signs/