

# SAFETY AND SECURITY for US Students Traveling Abroad

*Living and studying in another country will be an enriching and rewarding experience, especially if you are prepared and take certain precautions.*

*This brochure will introduce you to threats you may face and provide tips on avoiding unsafe situations. Following these precautions will reduce your risk of encountering problems.*

## *Did You Know?*

Groups of children and teens may swarm you and forcibly steal your personal belongings.



**"Act Smart. Be Safe."**



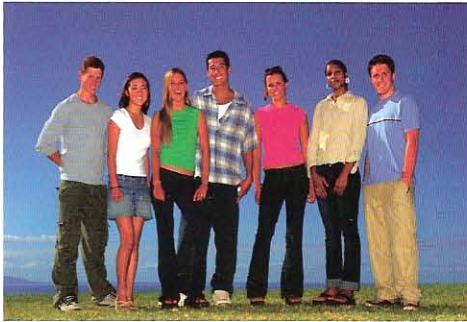
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

## Before You Go

**Familiarize yourself with local laws and customs** in the areas you plan to travel. You are expected to obey their laws, which may include dress standards, photography restrictions, telecommunication restrictions, curfews, etc.

### Plan your wardrobe

so that it does not offend the locals, nor draw unwanted attention to yourself. Americans are perceived as wealthy and are targeted for pick pocketing and other crimes. Do not wear expensive-looking jewelry and avoid wearing American team sports shirts or baseball caps that might indicate you are an American.



**Do not take any unnecessary identification or credit cards** in case they are stolen. Take only what is necessary. Obtain traveler's checks and do not carry a large amount of cash.

**Establish points of contact** for your family to contact and for your foreign hosts to contact in the event of an emergency.

**Make copies of your passport, airplane ticket, driver's license, and credit cards** that you take with you. Keep one copy at home; carry a second copy with you but separate from the originals. This will help speed the replacement process if they are lost or stolen.

**Take any necessary medications** with you in their original containers and keep them in your carry-on luggage (not checked baggage) during the flight.

**Obtain specific pre-travel country risk assessments** for the country/countries you plan to visit from your study abroad program manager, the State Department, and/or the FBI. There may be specific issues you should be aware of and prepare for that will ensure your safety and peace of mind.

Visit the State Department's Travel Advisory website at: [www.state.gov/travel](http://www.state.gov/travel), and the Center for Disease Control for Traveler's Health issues at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

## During Your Stay

**Protect your passport!** Theft of American tourist passports is on the rise. It is recommended that you carry your passport in a front pants pocket or in a pouch hidden in your clothes, and that it remain with you at all times. Some hotels require you to leave it at the desk during your stay and they may use it to register you with the local police--a routine policy. Ask for a receipt and be sure to retrieve your passport before continuing your trip. If your passport is lost or stolen, report the situation immediately to the nearest US Embassy or Consulate.



**Do not invite strangers into your room.**

**Be courteous and cooperative** when processing through customs. Do not leave your bags unattended. Stay alert.

**Use only authorized taxis.** Passengers have been robbed or kidnapped when using "gypsy" taxis.

**Avoid traveling alone**, especially after dark. Be conscious of your surroundings and avoid areas you believe may put your personal safety at risk. Be wary of street vendors and innocent-looking youngsters. It has been reported that while one person has your attention, the other is picking your pocket.



**Do not carry large amounts of cash.** Always deal with reputable currency exchange officials or you run the risk of receiving counterfeit currency. Keep a record of your financial transactions.

**Beware that theft** from sleeping compartments on trains is common.

**Do not leave drinks unattended** – someone could slip a drug into it that causes amnesia and sleep.

**Avoid long waits in lobbies and terminals**, if possible. These areas may be full of pickpockets, thieves, and violent offenders. Laptop theft is especially common in airports.

*In an international airport, a thief positioned himself to walk in front of a traveler who was walking with his roll bag. The thief stopped abruptly in front of the traveler causing the traveler to also stop. A second thief was following and quickly removed the traveler's laptop from his roll bag and disappeared.*

**Avoid civil disturbances and obey local laws.** 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. Be mindful that in many countries, it is prohibited to speak derogatorily of the government and its leaders. It may be illegal to take photographs of train stations, government buildings, religious symbols, and military installations.

**Avoid any actions that are illegal, improper or indiscreet.** Avoid offers of sexual companionship; they may lead to a room raid, photography, and blackmail. Do not attempt to keep up with your hosts in social drinking. Do not engage in black market activities. Do not sell your possessions. Do not bring in or purchase illegal drugs or pornography. Do not seek out political or religious dissidents. Do not accept packages or letters for delivery to another location.

*An American in China was given a letter by a man he had never met. He tried to return the letter but the man ran away. That evening, Chinese security officers visited the American, admonished him for taking the letter, and required him to sign a statement concerning the event.*

**If you are arrested** for any reason, ask to notify the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. A consular officer cannot arrange for free legal aid or provide bail money, but they can assist you. Do not admit to wrongdoing or sign anything. Do not agree to help your detainer.

**Keep a low profile and shun publicity.** Do not discuss personal or family information with local

news media, and as a general rule, be careful what information you share with foreigners. They may have been directed to obtain information about you for duplicitous purposes and may use what they learn to target or use against you.

**Evade criminals and terrorists by being aware of your surroundings** and alert to the possibility of surveillance. Do not challenge your followers, but make mental notes about them. Promptly report such incidents to appropriate security officials and/or the US Embassy or Consulate. In general, criminals will strike when their target seems most vulnerable and lax about his/her security. If you are kidnapped, remain calm and alert; comply with orders, be non-threatening, avoid arguments, and establish a program of mental and physical activity for yourself.

*"Turkey drop" scam in Russia: a person drops money in front of a victim while an accomplice waits for the money to be picked up and suggests splitting it. The first person returns and accuses both of stealing the money. This usually results in the victim's money being stolen.*

**Beware of new acquaintances who probe for information** about you or who attempt to get you involved in what could become a compromising situation.

**Do not gossip about character flaws**, financial problems, emotional relationships, or other difficulties of your fellow Americans or yourself. This information is eagerly sought by those who want to exploit you or your fellow travelers.

**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. Most foreign security services have various means of screening incoming visitors to identify persons of potential intelligence interest. They also have well established contacts with hotels and common hosts that can assist in various forms of monitoring you.

*Two American students on study abroad talked privately about the lighting in their apartment. The next day, a light that had been out for weeks was working.*

## Telephone, Laptop & PDA Security

### If you can do without the device, Do Not Take It!

**Do not leave electronic devices unattended.** Do not transport them (or anything valuable) in your checked baggage. Shield passwords from view. Avoid Wi-Fi networks if you can. In some countries they are controlled by security services; in all cases they are insecure.

**Sanitize your laptop, telephone, & PDA,** prior to travel and ensure no sensitive contact, research, or personal data is on them. Back-up all information you take and leave that at home. If feasible, use a different phone and a new email account while traveling.



**Use up-to-date protections** for antivirus, spyware, security patches, and firewalls. Don't use thumb drives given to you – they may be compromised.

*During the Beijing Olympics, hotels were required to install software so law enforcement could monitor the Internet activity of hotel guests.*

**Clear your browser** after each use: delete history files, caches, cookies, and temporary internet files.

**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.

If information might be valuable to another government, company or group, you should assume that it will be intercepted and retained. Security services and criminals can track your movements using your mobile phone and can turn on the microphone in your device even when you think it is turned off.

**Beware of "phishing."** Foreign security services and criminals are adept at pretending to be someone you trust in order to obtain personal or sensitive information.

**If your device is stolen,** report it immediately to the local US Embassy or Consulate.

**Change all your passwords** including your voicemail and check devices for malware when you return.

*Cyber criminals from numerous countries buy and sell stolen financial information including credit card data and login credentials (user names and passwords).*

## Upon Your Return

**Report any unusual circumstances** or noteworthy incidents to your study abroad program manager and to the FBI. Notifying the FBI will help ensure that future travel advisories take into consideration the circumstances and incidents you encountered. It is not uncommon for foreigners to contact you after your return. The FBI may be able to help you determine if these contacts pose any risk to you.

### Important Numbers

US Embassy/Consulate Phone & Address:

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POC in country: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Reminder

*Our country will be judged by the impression you make. As an American abroad, you serve as a spokesperson for the United States.*

Additional travel security tips and country threat assessments are available from the FBI upon request.

Your local FBI office #: \_\_\_\_\_