

# Office of International Programs

## Health & Safety

The University of Texas at Tyler is committed to ensuring that students are prepared to have a safe and healthy experience abroad. The following resources are provided to students to assist students begin preparing.

Remember you are ultimately responsible for the choices you make regarding your safety! Many places abroad are safer than the U.S., but your lack of familiarity with the culture, language, people and locales may put you at higher risk.

### Starting Point - U.S. State Department

Travel safety starts with careful reading of the U.S. State Department Travel Advisories before you leave the country. These are available on the web the [State Department website](#) or, you can listen to them by calling the Office of Overseas Citizens Service at (202) 647-5225 .

Find out about entry requirements for the countries you plan to visit. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you must call the embassy or consulate of the country you are planning to visit and check on the requirements for entry into that country for citizens of your nation. Foreign students planning to return to the U.S. to study after their study abroad period is over also need to contact their immigration advisor at the ISSFS office before they leave to make sure all paperwork is in order to return to the U.S.

Remember to register with the U.S. embassy located in the country that you will be in. This way you will be able to be alerted about emergencies and alerts that would impact you at any time. Registering also helps the government track you in case there is a need to have you evacuated. To register, submit your information to [The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#), a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in an emergency, and also provides routine information from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

### Health Care

Good medical insurance, here and abroad, is key. Your program will more than likely give you lists of providers if you are not covered already. Do not drop your U.S. health insurance just because you have study abroad insurance. Remember study abroad insurance only covers you while abroad. You will need your U.S. insurance for follow-up care or rehabilitation in case of an accident or illness.

The Center for [Disease Control website](#) will list some worst case scenarios and warnings regarding disease threats. For additional health information, the CDC maintains the International Travelers Hotline at (877) 394-8747. An automated fax back service is also available at (888) 232-3299.

Visit your doctor or travel clinic to receive advice on inoculations to prevent diseases affecting travelers. Be aware that you must take written prescriptions for all drugs you carry with you. Prescriptions are extremely important especially when crossing borders or going through customs at the airport. Not to mention when you need a refill! In some countries Ritalin may be a controlled substance. Likewise in some countries you can go to jail for carrying tranquilizers because they are illegal.

Know which health clinics are recommended for illness and where to go in the case of a serious emergency. Carry those numbers with you at all times.

Find out about local emergency services and how well they are trusted.

[The University Health Clinic](#) and [The University of Texas Health Science Center](#) are good resources for more information.

### **Who Should Know**

A backup copy of all of your documents (passport, prescriptions, travelers' checks, credit cards, I.D. card) should be left with your designated emergency contact. Another copy should be hidden inside of your luggage, or carried in a travel belt or pouch, any time you travel.

Ask your parents or designated emergency contact to get a passport, in case they need to go abroad to help you in an emergency.

### **Travel Smart**

Find a good travel guide for example, [Lonely Planet](#).

There are many other excellent travel guides available.

If you are planning to travel by road (bus or car) please note that cheaper is not always better. Don't penny-pinch and put yourself in danger. It is important to ask the locals about the bus company's record and road conditions. It is particularly dangerous to be on the road at night. Even in the U.S. night driving is several times more dangerous than day driving. Remember that if you are traveling through remote areas, the infrastructure, speed and availability of help may be extremely poor. Renting cars and motorbikes can be grounds for dismissal from many programs.

Prior to leaving your program site for travel, develop an itinerary and leave it with your program director and with your designated emergency contact. Inform people of your

plans. When making plans, keep in mind that it is best to save pleasure travel for after you have acclimated to being in the region and are more fluent in the language.

Always travel with a friend and share a room since hotel/hostel safety may be an issue in some places. Falling asleep in public spaces inside buses or trains will also be safer if you have a buddy to take turns being vigilant over not just possessions but also your person. Be alert to your surroundings and the people around you.

If you are carrying a laptop, do not call attention to it with a fancy case. Instead put it inside of your carry-on. Keep in mind that there might be customs regulations in the U.S. and abroad that apply to computers, expensive electronic and photographic equipment. It is a good idea to check with alumni of the program to find out if you really need to take your laptop. Consider purchasing special insurance for these types of electronic devices.

### **Stay Informed**

Keep informed of current political situations by listening daily to the television or radio news. In the case of an emergency, advisories may be made to the general public through the media. You will still find yourself with many surprises, such as strikes, that may cause you to change your plans. Stay out of the political affairs. You can be deported or worse -- end up arrested or hurt. Unsuspecting tourists sometimes find themselves in downtown areas during protests. If this occurs, you should leave the area immediately. There are several websites for newspapers on line:

- [Latin America](#)
- [Africa](#)
- [New York Times](#)

### **Departure/Arrival**

Schedule your initial flight to arrive in the morning or early afternoon. Remember that arrival procedures, including customs can take a bit of time. By arriving early, you will be giving yourself enough time to find food and accommodations or to get to your final destination before it gets dark and shops close down for the day.

Do not agree to look after packages or suitcases for anyone. Do not leave your own bags unattended at any time.

Register with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate upon arrival if you did not do so before departure (It is recommended that you register with the embassy prior to your departure). They will require a copy of your passport. This will be handy if you lose it because they will already have the basic information or if they need to contact you to alert you to potential problems.

Carry at least \$200 cash with you to take care of unexpected arrival expenses, such as taxes or fees and/or other incidental expenses. You can change some money before you

leave at any major bank or use the airport money exchange. Keep your money, passport, traveler's checks and all other important documents close to your person. Never leave them in your suitcase or carry-on. It is a good idea to use a neck pouch for your passport, some cash and credit cards and some kind of money belt or bag you can put under your clothing for extra cash and valuables.

### **Stepping Off The Plane**

Get yourself some water or better yet -- always carry bottled water with you, and get a bite to eat. This will help ease your mind and body of the culture shock.

Remember this is the time to calm down and not get frazzled. Pay attention to the location of your passport and visa documents. Put them in your neck pouch right away after going through customs and immigration.

Get the address of your destination before you leave the U.S., just in case your contact person doesn't meet you at the airport. This is also where local currency can be extremely helpful. A taxi may cost you more than it should, but this is to be expected in a foreign country where you haven't yet learned the "rules". Make sure you get a taxi or van service from the official airport fleet. Often there are booths that sell passes. If uncertain, check with airport information desk attendant.

Airports, bus and train stations are notorious for pickpockets and scam artists. Be alert, be firm.

Do not agree to carry things for others especially through border areas as it may be contraband. Be prepared to pay for visas and other fees. Look your best when going through customs and passport check points. Make sure you are not carrying anything considered illegal in the countries you are visiting. Check the customs regulations for the country prior to departure by contacting the appropriate consulate or embassy. Many travel guides list this information as well. Likewise, read all posted signs at the border crossings. Some border crossings require proof of vaccinations, which may not be a requirement when travelling by plane.

### **In the Classroom**

Living in a foreign culture can be a thrilling experience, but it can also be quite unsettling at times. Certain cultural mores and what is considered acceptable behavior can be confusing to the uninitiated, and that is common. However, cultural sensitivity does not take precedence over notions of decency and appropriate behavior. To that end, if you believe that you have been dealt with in an inappropriate manner, either sexually or otherwise, particularly in the classroom setting, you are to report any such behavior immediately to your Study Abroad Advisor.

### **Street Smarts**

Learn what women and men do in the culture to protect themselves.

Female travelers are sometimes more likely to encounter harassment. Uncomfortable situations can often be avoided by taking the following precautions. Dress conservatively. Although short skirts, shorts and tank tops may be comfortable, they may also encourage unwanted attention. Avoid walking alone at night or in questionable neighborhoods. Do not agree to meet a person whom you do not know in a secluded place. Be aware that some men from other countries tend to mistake the friendliness of American women for romantic interest. Unfortunately, there is also the stereotype that American women are "easy."

Body language may be interpreted completely different, find out what you are doing wrong if you are getting results that puzzle you.

Be cautious, when meeting new people. Don't give out your address and phone number to strangers or divulge too much personal information about yourself.

If you are going to withdraw money from an ATM machine, receive wired money through an American Express, Citibank or Western Union location, please go with a buddy that will help you stay alert to your surroundings. Pick your ATM location for safety and not just convenience.

Do not attract attention to yourself by speaking English loudly in public spaces or wearing expensive looking jewelry. These mannerisms will certainly attract thieves, or worse.

Taxis are not safe everywhere, especially late at night. Inquire about it. In some places, women just do not ride taxis by themselves, because it is not safe to ride a taxi with an unknown man. Men and women are often robbed and assaulted by taxi drivers. In many cities, taxis have gotten so dangerous that people use Radio Taxis, to get the names of reputable companies. It is hard to resist the temptation of flagging down a taxi. The wait is worth it. Please make sure that the taxi is identified so that if the call has been intercepted and several taxis show up you can pick the right one.

In general, do not hang around famous American hangouts (restaurants, bars, clubs and associations, consulates and embassies, etc.). Especially if there is a terrorist threat or if the U.S. has just participated in some military action. During times of international crisis, many U.S. embassies and consulates are picketed and threatened.

Do not be afraid to be assertive when confronted with unwanted situations. Do not let anyone push you into taking risks. If you feel unsafe, you probably are. Listen to your instincts.

When using public telephones, stand facing out so you can see your surroundings.

If someone stops you to ask for the time or to ask for directions, step away to a distance that is safer. Why would they consider asking an obviously foreign person for directions?

Please do not hitchhike no matter how many people tell you that it is perfectly safe. It is not!

Your life will always be more important than any of your possessions. Let them go and run away if necessary.

### **Risk Factors**

Some factors that increase risk are:

- being intoxicated
- being alone at night, especially after midnight
- being alone in an isolated area
- being alone in a high crime area
- being asleep in an unlocked place
- being out after a local curfew
- being new to the country
- being unable to speaking the local language
- being in a new place and having no established friends

### **Depression**

Be familiar with the symptoms of depression so that you can identify problem signs and can seek help if needed. Speaking another language all the time and getting used to cultural differences is tiring. You will need to pamper yourself from time to time. Take care of yourself. Be patient and flexible with others and yourself.

**For more information on health and safety issues, as well as health and safety updates, please visit the following related links:**

- [U.S. State Department Travel Warnings](#)
- [U.S. Embassies](#)
- [Tips for Students Studying Abroad](#) (Department of State website)
- [Safety Abroad Handbook](#) (USC Center of Global Education's resources and preparation tips for students considering studying abroad)