

Safety

Study Abroad Statement on Safety and Security

The safety and well-being of students, faculty, and staff who are participating in ISU programs abroad is of the highest importance. The Study Abroad Center (SAC) has established policies and procedures designed to safeguard the safety and well-being of study abroad participants.

The SAC monitors the safety and security situation at all program sites. Study abroad program participants abroad are notified via e-mail if the U.S. State Department issues a country-specific Warning or Announcement.

Procedures are in place should an individual program participant, or all program participants, need to be evacuated from the program site.

The SAC is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, through an emergency cell phone. To contact the ISU Study Abroad Center **24 hours a day, 7 days a week**, call:

ISU Police
(001) 515-294-4428

You may also contact the SAC during office hours at (001) 515-294-6792.

Addressing safety and well-being begins with training the Program Directors and providing all program participants with pre-departure orientation. Program participants are provided with extensive written information and resources, available both in print and on the SAC website.

Student Responsibilities

The SAC encourages students to take responsibility for their own safety and security by carefully reading the information, advice, and resources provided, including the following websites:

www.state.gov
www.cdc.gov

Students should also do the following:

- Check to make sure emergency contact information is current (provided on the original program application).
- Check to make sure the Program Director has a photocopy of your passport (or, if not in a group program, leave a copy with your emergency contact person).
- Leave an itinerary and contact information with your Program Director or on-site staff for all additional travel not associated with the program.
- Carry an emergency telephone contact list.
- Know the local equivalent of 911 for your program site.
- If you have a cell phone, store your emergency contact's phone number under ICE (In Case of Emergency) so that emergency/medical personnel can contact your family.

Safety information

Must-read safety web site for everyone traveling abroad:

www.state.gov U. S. State Department

When you are traveling abroad, here are the top 10 tips to make your trip easier:

1. Make sure you have a signed, valid passport (and visas, if required). Before you go, fill in the emergency information page of your passport.
2. Read the Consular Information Sheets (and Public Announcements or Travel Warnings, if applicable) for the countries you plan to visit.
3. Familiarize yourself with local laws and customs of the countries to which you are traveling. Remember, the U.S. Constitution does not follow you! While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws.
4. Make two copies of your passport identification page. This will facilitate replacement if your passport is lost or stolen. Leave one copy at home with friends or relatives. Carry the other with you in a place separate from your passport.
5. Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home so that you can be contacted in case of an emergency.
6. Do not leave your luggage unattended in public areas. Do not accept packages from strangers.
7. Prior to your departure, you should register with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate through the State Department's travel registration website (www.state.gov). Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts may not be released without your express authorization.
8. To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing and expensive jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money or unnecessary credit cards.
9. In order to avoid violating local laws, deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money or purchase art or antiques.
10. If you get into trouble, contact the nearest U.S. embassy.

Precautions to take while traveling

Safety on the Street. Use the same common sense traveling overseas that you would at home. Be especially cautious in (or avoid) areas where you may be

more easily victimized. These include crowded subways, train stations, elevators, tourist sites, market places, festivals, and crime-ridden neighborhoods.

Don't use short cuts, narrow alleys, or poorly lit streets.

Try not to travel alone at night.

Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances.

Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments.

Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers.

Avoid scam artists by being wary of strangers who approach you and offer to be your guide or sell you something at bargain prices.

Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will:

- jostle you
- ask you for directions or the time,
- point to something spilled on your clothing,
- or distract you by creating a disturbance.

Beware of groups of vagrant children who create a distraction while picking your pocket.

Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers.

Try to seem purposeful when you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. Try to ask for directions only from individuals in authority.

Know how to use a pay telephone and have the proper change or token on hand.

Learn a few phrases in the local language or have them handy in written form so that you can signal your need for police or medical help.

Make a note of emergency telephone numbers you may need: police, fire, your hotel, and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

If you are confronted, don't fight back; give up your valuables.

Safety in your hotel

Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby.

Do not leave money and other valuables in your hotel room while you are out. Use the hotel safe.

If you are out late at night, let someone know when you expect to return.

If you are alone, do not get on an elevator if there is a suspicious-looking person inside.

Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room. Know how to report a fire, and be sure you know where the nearest fire exits and alternate exits are located. (Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit; this could be a lifesaver if you have to crawl through a smoke-filled corridor.)

Safety on Public Transportation

If a country has a pattern of tourists being targeted by criminals on public transport, that information is mentioned in the Consular Information Sheets in the section about crime.

Taxis. Only take taxis clearly identified with official markings. Beware of unmarked cabs.

Trains. Well-organized, systematic robbery of passengers on trains along popular tourists routes is a problem. It is more common at night and especially on overnight trains.

If you see your way being blocked by a stranger and another person is very close to you from behind, move away. This can happen in the corridor of the train or on the platform or station.

Do not accept food or drink from strangers. Criminals have been known to drug food or drink offered to passengers. Criminals may also spray sleeping gas in train compartments. Where possible, lock your compartment. If it cannot be locked securely, take turns sleeping in shifts with your traveling companions. If that is not possible, stay awake. If you must sleep unprotected, tie down your luggage and secure your valuables to the extent possible.

Do not be afraid to alert authorities if you feel threatened in any way. Extra police are often assigned to ride trains on routes where crime is a serious problem.

Buses. The same type of criminal activity found on trains can be found on public buses on popular tourist routes. For example, tourists have been drugged and robbed while sleeping on buses or in bus stations. In some countries, whole busloads of passengers have been held up and robbed by gangs of bandits.

Dealing with terrorism

Terrorist acts occur unpredictably, making it impossible to protect yourself absolutely. The first and best protection is to avoid travel to areas where there has been a persistent record of terrorist attacks or kidnappings.

Most terrorist attacks are the result of careful planning. Just as a car thief will first be attracted to an unlocked car with the key in the ignition, terrorists are looking for the most accessible targets. The chances that a tourist, traveling with an unpublished program or itinerary, would be the victim of terrorism are slight. In addition, many terrorist groups, seeking publicity for political causes within their own country or region, may not be looking for American targets. Nevertheless, the following pointers may help you avoid becoming a target of opportunity. **They should be considered as adjuncts to the tips listed in the previous sections** on how to protect yourself against the far greater likelihood of being a victim of crime. These precautions may provide some degree of protection and can serve as practical and psychological deterrents to would-be terrorists.

Schedule direct flights if possible and avoid stops in high-risk airports or areas.

- Be cautious about what you discuss with strangers or what others may overhear.

Try to minimize the time spent in the public area of an airport, which is a less protected area. Move quickly from the check-in counter to the secured areas. Upon arrival, leave the airport as soon as possible.

- As much as possible, avoid luggage tags, dress, and behavior that may identify you as an American.

Keep an eye out for abandoned packages or briefcases or other suspicious items. Report them to airport authorities and leave the area promptly.

- Avoid obvious terrorist targets such as places where Americans and Westerners are known to congregate.

How to reduce your risk of being a victim of a crime

- Be aware of your surroundings
- Move confidently
- Stay in well-lit, busy areas, especially after dark
- Employ the “buddy system” (don’t go anywhere alone)
- Blend in
- Dress like the locals
- Dress conservatively
- Act conservatively
- Don’t walk with maps or guidebooks

Safety

- Drink responsibly
- Avoid confrontations
- Avoid public demonstrations
- Become familiar with local customs
- Be aware of scams
- Carry your carry-on bag or backpack/day bag on the side away from the street so bicyclists and motorcyclists can't snatch it.
- Keep your bag under your elbow or in your lap.
- Carry traveler's checks
- Carry your camera with caution
- Secure your belongings when you are in youth hostels
- Do not leave bags/luggage unattended
- Take only a manageable amount of luggage

Road safety

At an October 2000 Congressional hearing on "Safety in Study Abroad", it was stated that the major cause of student injury or death in overseas programs is traffic accidents. According to the U.S. State Department, road travel is the greatest risk to healthy Americans abroad.

This doesn't just refer to those who drive a car but also **refers to you as a pedestrian and as a rider in a taxi or bus.**

The following helpful checklists are from the website of the Association for Safe International Road Travel at www.asirt.org.

Pedestrian safety checklist

These guidelines serve as suggestions. Each suggestion will not necessarily apply in your country or location. Be alert is traveling in a country where vehicles travel on the left side of the road.

Good habits while on the road

- Be aware of local traffic patterns. Understand local road culture.
- Be alert at intersections in countries where traffic pattern differs from yours.
- Be alert to reckless driver behaviors (e.g. speeding, inattention to driving, disregard for pedestrians, signs and signals)
- Many countries have narrow, winding streets where visibility of pedestrian is compromised.

- At night, wear or carry something reflective or carry a light, so that motorists' attention will be attracted to you.
- At night, cross where the lights are bright and visibility is good.
- Avoid walking where you cannot be easily seen.
- Remember that the **KERB DRILL** (Look right, look left, look right again) must be reversed in countries where the traffic pattern is reversed.
- Be alert for vehicles which can suddenly turn into the street.
- Walk on the sidewalk where there is one. Where there is none, walk on the road bank or on the right side of the road in single file, facing oncoming traffic.
- Always stand on the sidewalk, or at the edge of the road, not in the street while waiting to cross.
- Be just as alert and careful when crossing in groups as when alone, and do not depend on others to watch out for you.
- Always look very carefully when crossing the road from behind or in front of stationary vehicles.
- Use provisions for crossing (e.g. Police Officer, Pedestrian Crossing, Traffic Lights).
- Look and listen for warning signals of motor vehicles especially when crossing at a bend. If possible, don't cross where there is a bend in the road.
- Cross where there is a clear view in both directions, when it can be done safely.
- Be alert for train crossings that might not be marked or obvious.
- When you have alighted from a vehicle, wait until it moves off before crossing.
- Do not adopt the attitude that because you have the right of way in the pedestrian crossing, you are automatically safe to cross. In many countries drivers ignore stop signs, signal lights, pedestrian right-of-way.
- Jaywalking may result in severe fines in various countries
- Get into or out of a vehicle on the side nearest the sidewalk or edge of the road. If you use the door on the street side, wait for a break in traffic to exit the vehicle.
- Remember most road fatalities are pedestrians

Personal safety of pedestrians

- Avoid crowds when you have to slow down. Every time you slow down while walking in a street you become an easier target.
- Be suspicious if somebody slows you down (e.g. falls in front of you, clothing gets stuck on something). It may be a pretext to facilitate an accomplice who is behind you.
- Be aware of who is behind you. If the same person is behind you for a few minutes, be suspicious.
- A decoy wallet may help distract the thief. The thief will target your very visible wallet, while your money is somewhere else (eg, in another pocket).
- Avoid walking with big luggage. The bigger the luggage, the more visible you are and the harder it is for you to defend yourself. Backpacks can be easily opened even while you are walking.
- In most countries it is inappropriate to approach strangers (especially women).

Anybody who approaches you, no matter how friendly, should make you a little suspicious. Keep your guard up and be careful when talking to strangers. Americans tend to be more trusting and open than other people. Understand that this may be used to put you in an unsafe situation. Locals know that Americans are raised to be nice to people who are nice to them. Do not smile at people you do not know. A smile can be interpreted as “I am saying no but I mean yes”.

- In most countries women never respond to strangers. For a foreign woman it is not good to respond to men who approach her. The appropriate behavior is cold silence and indifference.
- Walk fast all the time. Every time you stop to browse, shop, write a postcard or take a picture you become an easy target.
- Dress modestly. Do not dress to call attention to yourself.
- Be suspicious of any one who asks to see your money. Ask to be taken to the nearest police station before they search.
- Avoid hitchhiking

Taxi and Bus Passenger Safety Checklist

Taxi Safety Checklist

Suggestions for Road Safety

- 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 or 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

- 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.

Information on Taxi Fares

- If the driver tries to bargain instead of using the meter or claims his meter is broken, get out of the taxi.
- Ask a trustworthy individual what the fare should be.
- The key to successful bargaining is to ask the driver what the fare is before getting into the taxi. Once you sit down, you are the taxi's next fare.

Bus and 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.

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