Health and Safety

Welcome to the Health, Safety and Security page.

The information in this section of our website is also available as part of our Pre-Departure Guide. All students, as part of their study abroad contract will sign indicating that they have read and understood the material listed in the pre-departure guide. In addition to the contents of our Pre-Departure Guide, The Center for Global Education has launched a series of pre-departure materials including a general handbook and 29 country-specific references for you to use as you prepare for your program.

Students are also encouraged to contact the Study Abroad Office or any of the SAO Staff with questions pertaining to health, safety, and security matters. In the event of an emergency, students should be prepared to call the University of Pittsburgh police on their 24-hour line: 412-624-2121 or via email: police@pitt.edu. The Pitt Police will contact SAO staff immediately.

Health, Safety and Security While Overseas

The more prepared a student is for a study abroad program, the better equipped s/he will be adjust to the host culture. However, students will inevitably feel disorientation as they settle into their new "homes". This sense of discomfort is called culture shock and accompanies all travelers who spend a significant time outside of the United States. Many students also experience homesickness. In addition to culture shock, there are a number of issues that students must be aware of during their time overseas. Some pertain to all students and some are specific men and women when travelling abroad. These include handling emergencies from abroad, managing the academic program, developing a personal budget, and avoiding offenses that could involve expulsion from the program. All students should understand the nuances of the culture, particularly if they choose to live with a host family. Most students will travel while overseas and should become familiar with all of the options as well as the related risks. In an effort to fully internalize and remember a study abroad experience, the SAO recommends that students keep a journal during their time overseas. Journaling can help preserve memories of the wonderful experiences you have had and help you cope with re-entry shock, a phenomenon experienced by many students when they return home.
Adjusting to Life Abroad

Culture shock/adjustment is anxiety experienced by those who attempt to go about normal, daily activities in the absence of familiar patterns of communication and social interaction. Our expectations of the host culture, shaped by our own patterns of behavior or culture, sometimes 'clash' with the reality of the host country's culture. Initially many travelers experience feelings of anxiousness and excitement, which turn to feelings of discomfort, frustration, or anxiety over the absence of familiar patterns. Eventually these feelings change again and mellow out as you begin to accommodate and integrate new cultural norms.

The following are a few disconcerting situations that even "well prepared" study abroad participants have experienced as they adjusted to their new "homes." Such sources of discomfort are part of culture shock:

- Not knowing how to set the dinner table.
- Making embarrassing hand gestures without even realizing it.
- Misinterpreting hand gestures.
- Not getting innuendoes.
- Not understanding what people are saying even though they are speaking English.
- Ordering chips and getting fries.
- Knowing when to kiss and when not to.
- Living in the host country for 6 months and still getting gasps of surprise from host nationals when you say a basic greeting and order food in a restaurant.

Three Responses to the Process of Cultural Adjustment: Fight, Flight, and Adaptation. The disease called "always being right" best expresses the response FIGHT. This is wanting to show the natives a better way of doing something; more effective, quicker, etc. Be very conscious of some of your responses and behaviors. You may have engaged in "Fight" and have been unaware of it. Your journal can assist you here because you can analyze your daily interactions.

You may notice U.S. students hanging out together a lot while studying abroad. These students are engaged in flight. That is, avoidance of the host culture and things that make them feel uncomfortable by surrounding themselves with only familiar people and things.

Adaptation basically represents the process of adjustment, i.e., understanding the culture of your host country, accepting new ideas and integrating new concepts into your existing patterns of interaction. During this process you may find yourself compromising. There is nothing wrong with that. You must decide for yourself what actions are right for you. You may realize that for your acceptance into your new community you may do things that you would not do at home. That's okay, because you are not at home and the rules are different there.

An example: "In my host family, the expectation was that the father was always served by a female member of the family during meals. On one occasion all of the women, except for me, were out and I was to take care of dinner. From my American and personal point of view, I find it very difficult to be expected to wait on someone, particularly in a family setting."
However, I served my host father out of respect for him and the community I was living in. I could have made other decisions about this situation and held to my personal values, but that might have created an uncomfortable situation.

Remember, the emotional highs and lows of studying abroad are NORMAL. It happens to everyone, though some experience it more severely than others.

**Homesickness**

Almost everybody experiences it. It is completely normal. Dealing with it is important, though, so that it does not hinder your valuable time in your new home.

Be nice to yourself. Cry a little, take some time out to be alone, write a long letter to someone you miss, but try to concentrate on the good things that you are doing and seeing. Then pick yourself up and go out and have some fun. Try not to let yourself be in a slump for a whole day, remember- you're in a very exciting place with so much to see and do and so little time. You may want to develop some of your pictures and send them home, so that you can be reminded that you are indeed experiencing something unique!

**Information for Women**

You may find that stereotypes about American women abound overseas. The stereotypes, as you can imagine, are not always flattering. Rather, they tend to suggest that U.S. women are very sexually active, most likely using TV and movies as examples.

Words of wisdom from women travelers:

- Be careful of talking about sex. It may equate as a come on.
- Be careful in asking men to dance in clubs.
- Be aware of going to clubs alone. This may be interpreted as an "open invitation".
- Do not hitchhike alone and think twice about doing it in pairs.
- Do not respond to the many catcalls you may receive. Just walk on.
- Kissing a male friend hello or goodbye may be misinterpreted.
- Be firm and assertive when you say NO. Be clear and direct to be certain that your intention and the words are understood.
- Be aware that things which may appear as normal to you, such as getting drunk or asking someone to walk you home, may be misconstrued as an indication of poor character and place you in uncomfortable situations.

Violence against women is a growing concern all over the world. Sometimes when women are out of familiar environment, guards are let down. Always be alert and use the same safety precautions as you would in Pittsburgh, no matter where you are going. If something negative should happen to you, go to someone related to your program for assistance. Unfortunately, in many countries the issue of female harassment is handled quite lightly and you may be treated
accordingly.

On the same note, women are subject to the same kinds of dangers abroad as they are in the United States, including the danger of rape. The occurrence of rape is often accompanied by the use of date-rape drugs, such as roofies and GHB (also known as Liquid Ecstasy, it produces a state similar to that of being drunk). Again, use the same precautions abroad that you would in the U.S., and think about these three simple common sense measures that could prevent you from being drugged:

- Do not leave your drink unattended or exchange drinks with anyone else.
- Don't accept a drink from anyone, no matter how nice they seem.
- Avoid drinking from a large open container

Information for Men

Many of the above concerns apply to men as well as women. Again, the actions which seem perfectly normal and natural in the U.S., can easily be misconstrued or out of place in another country. American men are generally stereotyped as being particularly loud, militant, and protective of their female counterparts. One decidedly negative stereotype of American men is their inability to behave appropriately in public, particularly when alcohol is involved.

Be aware of the accepted, cultural norms which surround the country you are in. You are ultimately responsible for your own well-being.

All students remember you are guests in a foreign country. Behave in such a way that you are "asked back".

Emergencies On-site

Most study abroad programs have pre-planned procedures for emergency evacuations in times of crisis. However, you may not be made aware of the specific procedures due to national security. If a situation should occur in which these plans need to be activated, you would be informed about how to proceed. Remember, at any given time, in any given place, a situation could occur. For this reason, students should take general precautions while living overseas. For example, be alert to the possibility of being under surveillance and report anyone loitering around your residence, following you, or acting suspicious. Also, pay attention to daily news reports.

Offenses related to welfare, health, or safety is committed when a student:
1. Uses, possesses, or manufactures, without University authorization, firearms, explosives, weapons, or other dangerous articles or substances injurious to person or property.

2. Refuses to vacate buildings, street walks, driveways, or other facilities of the University when directed to do so by an official of the University or any other lawful authority having just cause or fails to vacate a University building, including residence halls, when a fire alarm sounds.

3. Uses, possesses, distributes, sells, or is under the influence of narcotics, hallucinogenics, dangerous drugs, controlled substances except as permitted by law, or possesses drug paraphernalia which can be demonstrated to be linked to drug activity, such as bongs with drug residue.

4. Students who are knowingly present during the commission of the violation(s) of "uses, possesses, distributes, sells, or is under the influence of narcotics, hallucinogenics, dangerous drugs, controlled substances except as permitted by law, or possesses paraphernalia which can be demonstrated to be linked to drug activity, such as bongs with drug residue," will be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

5. Possesses or consumes alcoholic beverages if under the age permitted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or if in facilities where prohibited by the University; or dispenses alcoholic beverages to an individual who is under the age permitted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or violates any provision of the University alcohol policies.

6. Students who are knowingly present during the commission of the violation(s) of "possesses or consumes alcoholic beverages if under the age permitted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or if in facilities where prohibited by the University; or dispenses alcoholic beverages to an individual who is under the age permitted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or violates any provision of the University alcohol policies," will be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

7. Falsely reports a fire, or activates emergency warning equipment, or communicates false information regarding the existence of explosives on University property.

8. Abuses, removes, or damages fire safety equipment.

9. Engages in games of chance for money or other gain in violation of the law.

10. Ignites or burns materials which cause a fire.

11. Ignites or burns incense, candles, and/or like materials.

12. Violates University restrictions on smoking.
January 17, 2008

This Worldwide Caution updates information on the continuing threat of terrorist actions and violence against Americans and interests throughout the world. American citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness. This supersedes the Worldwide Caution dated October 9, 2007.

The Department of State remains concerned about the continued threat of terrorist attacks, demonstrations and other violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests overseas. Current information suggests that al-Qaida and affiliated organizations continue to plan terrorist attacks against U.S. interests in multiple regions, including Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. These attacks may employ a wide variety of tactics including suicide operations, assassinations, kidnappings, hijackings and bombings.

Extremists may elect to use conventional or non-conventional weapons, and target both official and private interests. Examples of such targets include high-profile sporting events, residential areas, business offices, hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools, public areas and locales where Americans gather in large numbers, including during holidays. In August 2007, two bombs exploded almost simultaneously at an amusement park and a restaurant in India, killing at least 42 people. In June 2007, two unexploded car bombs were discovered in London.

Americans are reminded of the potential for terrorists to attack public transportation systems. Recent examples include multiple terrorist attacks on trains in India in 2006, the July 2005 London Underground bombings, and the March 2004 train attacks in Madrid. In addition, extremists may also select aviation and maritime services as possible targets, such as the August 2006 plot against aircraft in London, or the December 2006 bomb at Madrid's Barajas International Airport. In June 2007, a vehicle was driven into the main terminal at Glasgow International Airport and burst into flames, but the bomb failed to detonate.

The Middle East and North Africa

Credible information indicates terrorist groups seek to continue attacks against U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa. Terrorist actions may include bombings, hijackings, hostage taking, kidnappings, and assassinations. While conventional weapons such as explosive devices are a more immediate threat in many areas, use of non-conventional weapons, including chemical or biological agents, must be considered a possible threat. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Increased security at official U.S. facilities has led terrorists and their sympathizers to seek softer targets such as public transportation, residential areas, and public areas where people congregate, including restaurants, hotels, clubs, and shopping areas.

On December 11, 2007, two vehicle-borne explosive devices were detonated at the UN headquarters in Algiers and the Algerian Constitutional Council. Three other suicide bomb attacks in July and September of 2007 in Algeria killed more than 80 people. In July
2007, suspected al-Qaeda operatives carried out a vehicle-borne explosive device attack on tourists at the Bilquis Temple in Yemen, which resulted in the deaths of eight Spanish tourists and their two Yemeni drivers. There was a series of bombings in Morocco in March and April 2007, two of which occurred simultaneously outside the U.S. Consulate General and the private American Language Center in Casablanca. Additionally, an attack took place on the American International School in Gaza in April 2007. These events underscore the intent of terrorist entities to target facilities perceived to cater to Westerners. The September 2006 attack on the U.S. embassy in Syria and the March 2006 bombing near the U.S. consulate in Karachi, Pakistan illustrate the continuing desire of extremists to strike American targets.

Potential targets are not limited to those companies or establishments with overt U.S. ties. For instance, terrorists may target movie theaters, liquor stores, bars, casinos, or any similar type of establishment, regardless of whether they are owned and operated by host country nationals. Due to varying degrees of security at all such locations, Americans should be particularly vigilant when visiting these establishments.

The violence in Iraq, clashes between Palestinians and Israelis, clashes between terrorist extremists and the Lebanese Armed Forces, and the violence in Pakistan following the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007 have the potential to produce demonstrations and unrest throughout the region. Americans are reminded that demonstrations and rioting can occur with little or no warning. In addition, the Department of State continues to warn of the possibility for violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests in the region. Anti-American violence could include possible terrorist actions against aviation, ground transportation, and maritime interests, specifically in the Middle East, including the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa.

The Department is concerned that extremists may be planning to carry out attacks against Westerners and oil workers on the Arabian Peninsula. Armed attacks targeting foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia that resulted in many deaths and injuries, including U.S. citizens, appear to have been preceded by extensive surveillance. Tourist destinations in Egypt that are frequented by Westerners were attacked in April 2006 resulting in many deaths and injuries, including Americans. Extremists may be surveilling Westerners, particularly at hotels, housing areas, and rental car facilities. Potential targets may include U.S. contractors, particularly those related to military interests. Financial or economic venues of value also could be considered as possible targets; the failed attack on the Abqaiq oil processing facility in Saudi Arabia in late February 2006 and the September 2006 attack on oil facilities in Yemen are examples.

**East Africa**

A number of al-Qaida operatives and other extremists are believed to be operating in and around East Africa. As a result of the conflict in Somalia, some of these individuals may seek to relocate elsewhere in the region. Americans considering travel to the region and those already there should review their plans carefully, remain vigilant with regard to their
personal security, and exercise caution. Terrorist actions may include suicide operations, bombings, kidnappings or targeting maritime vessels. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Increased security at official U.S. facilities has led terrorists to seek softer targets such as hotels, beach resorts, prominent public places, and landmarks. In particular, terrorists may target civil aviation and seaports. Americans in remote areas or border regions where military or police authority is limited or non-existent could also become targets.

Americans considering seaborne travel near the Horn of Africa or in the southern Red Sea should exercise extreme caution, as there have been several incidents of armed attacks, robberies, and kidnappings for ransom at sea by pirates during the past several years. Merchant vessels continue to be hijacked in Somali territorial waters, while others have been hijacked as far as 200 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia in international waters.

The U.S. Government maritime authorities advise mariners to avoid the port of Mogadishu, and to remain at least 200 nautical miles off the coast of Somalia. In addition, when transiting around the Horn of Africa or in the Red Sea, it is strongly recommended that vessels travel in convoys, and maintain good communications contact at all times.

Central Asia

The U.S. Government continues to receive information that terrorist groups in Central Asia may be planning attacks in the region, possibly against U.S. Government facilities, American citizens, or American interests. Elements and supporters of extremist groups present in Central Asia, including the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), al-Qaida, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, have expressed anti-U.S. sentiments in the past and have demonstrated the capability to conduct terrorist operations in the region. Previous terrorist attacks conducted in Central Asia have involved improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers and have targeted public areas, such as markets, local government facilities, and, in 2004, the U.S. and Israeli Embassies in Uzbekistan. In addition, hostage-takings and skirmishes have occurred near the Uzbek-Tajik-Kyrgyz border areas.

Before You Go

U.S. citizens living or traveling abroad are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the State Department's travel registration web site at https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrui/ so that they can obtain updated information on travel and security. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy or Consulate to contact them in case of emergency.

U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance, be aware of local events, and take the appropriate steps to bolster their personal security. For additional information, please refer to "A Safe Trip Abroad" found at http://travel.state.gov.
U.S. Government facilities worldwide remain at a heightened state of alert. These facilities may temporarily close or periodically suspend public services to assess their security posture. In those instances, U.S. embassies and consulates will make every effort to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens. Americans abroad are urged to monitor the local news and maintain contact with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

As the Department continues to develop information on any potential security threats to U.S. citizens overseas, it shares credible threat information through its Consular Information Program documents, available on the Internet at http://travel.state.gov. In addition to information on the Internet, travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the U.S. and Canada or, outside the U.S. and Canada on a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444.