

University of Northern Iowa

Study Abroad Center

Quick Tips and Street Smarts to Practice During Study Abroad



The UNI Study Abroad Center compiled a list of quick tips and guidelines for study abroad participants to practice good street smarts. Staying safe during an abroad experience is the participant's responsibility, and by following these guidelines one can minimize dangerous events. These events may be prevented by being informed, being alert, asking the right questions, and staying in touch.

BEING AN AMERICAN ABROAD:

No matter how well you try to blend in with the culture abroad, you will stand out as an American. Your mannerisms, the way you carry yourself, dress, and speak set you apart. Americans may be victimized based on how they stand out, are predictable, naïve, and often are perceived as wealthy. Compared to other countries' standards, U.S. Foreign Policy may also be a reason U.S. citizens become victims abroad.

TRY TO BLEND IN & BE INFORMED:

- Be inconspicuous, become an observer
- Dress smart, dress like a local
- Don't wear clothes with the U.S. flag on them, hoodies, white socks/tennis shoes, clothes with brands displayed (i.e. North Face, Columbia)
- Know where you are going ahead of time
- Stay informed of U.S. politics, know your stance on the issues and if confronted on these; don't fight back
- Know your country: learn about the country's culture, laws, customs and common crimes (OSAC.gov, CDC.gov)

CROWDED PUBLIC PLACES:

- Protecting your valuables in crowded places is very important to avoid becoming a victim of theft. Think about how you will keep your possessions safe in various situations.
- Be aware of pick-pocketers, especially in crowded spaces
 - Only carry the valuables you need
 - Use wallets, purses, and camera bags with zippers
 - Always carry a copy of your passport and keep your passport safe at all times
 - Keep all your valuables in front of you or on you at all times, including backpacks
 - Don't leave your items unattended (i.e. in cafes, at school)



LOCAL TRANSPORTATION:

- Check the safety and reliability of various modes of public transportation
- Know your route before you leave, avoid using maps in public, and have a plan B
- Know the schedule of transportation operations
- Be sure you have phone numbers for a reliable taxi company or ask a restaurant or hotel receptionist to call for you
- When traveling, sleep on your bag and loop your arms around it
- Avoid operating vehicles abroad; if inevitable, know the local road rules
- Pedestrian Safety: In some countries, you have to avoid motorcycles on sidewalks; crosswalks also may be different

HOUSING SECURITY:

- Keep valuables in a secure location (bring a lock)
- Use a doorstop with a closed door, while in your room
- Don't share your address with new friends or strangers

SAFE SEX:

- Availability of contraceptives varies; condoms are different in different countries and may not be as accessible
- STDs: Concentration of STDs are different in different countries; some have high HIV concentrations
- LGBTQA: Perceptions of sexual minorities differ globally; visit <http://travel.state.gov> for more information

GENDER SAFETY:

- Opinions on appropriate women's behavior vary (i.e. eye contact, greeting or introductions)
- Be respectful of cultural views on women and men
- Both men and women should NOT announce that you are traveling alone, do not accept drinks or rides from strangers, watch your drink being poured/opened and do not leave it unattended (an unattended drink is considered a "DEAD-DRINK")
- Expect differences in dating cultures
- You can always walk away ("No" means many things in different countries)
- Consider the style of dress in your host country (flashy vs. conservative dress)
- Be respectful of religious differences influencing gender roles



DURING THE FIRST COUPLE DAYS OR WEEKS...

- Know how you are going to arrive in-country
- Know about host families that will be assigned to you 2-4 weeks before you arrive
- Consult with your advisor about program-specific arrival and orientation details
- What is your back-up plan if a flight is delayed or no one is there to pick you up? (plan B and C)



HOW TO AVOID BEING A VICTIM OF RAPE:

- Rapists always look for vulnerabilities and some rapists will "test" their victims (set clear boundaries). Rapists will often use tactics such as force and violence, threats and intimidation, persuasion, confidence, and pressure and guilt on their victims. Americans often don't know how to set clear boundaries abroad because we are afraid to offend (overcome your fear to offend). **Here are some tips:**
- Take a different route to your destination
 - Know how to say "help" or "fire" in foreign languages
 - Walk with confidence
 - Meet people in public places
 - Be one step ahead of an attacker (Carry your keys between your fingers, consider footwear and hairstyle should an attack occur. For example, ponytails can be easily grabbed, heels are hard to run in, etc.)
 - Get a whistle
 - Surrender or fight? If fight, always go for the head or eyes

TIPS ON STAYING SAFE:

- No matter cultural differences, use common sense
- Don't let your guard down, safety incidents typically occur during the first and last month of being abroad
- Remain aware of surroundings
- Listen to the locals, stay away from dangerous locations and situations
- Know where you are going and how you are getting there (i.e. day & weekend trips, night out with friends)
- Know how and when you are getting back in advance
- Carry translations of important addresses & common phrases in your wallet
- Use the buddy system
- Keep some "rob money" in a pocket separate from other funds (about \$20 USD) that you can easily give up; no amount of money is worth losing your life
- Keep SAC and your loved ones up-to-date on your trips

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS:

- Know who to call, have a list of emergency contacts in-country and back in the U.S.
- Have an emergency to go bag
- If you need to get in contact with UNI, call Public Safety first, they will contact Study Abroad
- Know the local equivalent of 911
- To report in case of a sexual assault or gender-based crime contact UNI's Title IX officer

Emergency Contact Information:

CISI phone: 240-330-1520

UNI SAC phone: 319-273-7078

UNI Public Safety: 319-273-4000 (24 hour number)

UNI Title IX Officer Leah Gutknecht: 319-273-2846