

# Study Abroad Handbook Worldwide: Basic Health and Safety

In this section, you will find information on how to stay well while Abroad and while traveling to other countries. The process of wellness starts before you go abroad with a visit to your doctor. You may need to get inoculations to protect you from various illnesses before traveling. You will also learn some tips about food and water safety.

Contents:

## 1. General Travel Safety

**Planning for a Healthy and Safe Time Abroad:** Learn all you can about the health and safety issues of all the countries where you plan to study and travel. This includes reading about the cultural and political climate of those countries, as well as learning about how others view people from your country, race, ethnic group, religion, gender and sexual orientation.

## 2. Travel Safety Abroad

**Planning for a Healthy and Safe Time Abroad:** Preparation for your time Abroad should include an understanding of the current political, cultural and religious events of the country as well as the region, and an awareness of the social climate. Students are advised to be alert to their surroundings, and be particularly aware of any health and safety advisories for the areas in which they will be studying.

**Getting a Balanced Perspective on Health and Safety Abroad:** In order to gain a more objective perspective on how safe travel to Abroad is, view the health and safety reports on Abroad from a variety of sources. We have provided a table below with links (on the left) to the Australian, Canadian and British governments' country advisories on Abroad. On the right side of the table are links to those same governments' perspectives on safety in the United States, which you can use to compare health and safety issues Abroad and the United States.

### Comparing Safety Worldwide and the United States



[Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Worldwide](#)

[Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: USA](#)



[Canada: Consular Affairs – Worldwide](#)

[Canada: Consular Affairs – USA](#)

[United Kingdom: Foreign Affairs and](#)

[United Kingdom: Foreign Affairs and](#)



### 3. Important Health and Safety Issues

Visit this page to see the top ten health and safety issues you should be aware of before you depart for Abroad and the other countries to which you may be traveling.

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**Illnesses, Diseases, and Inoculations:** Find out about the various illnesses that might be more common Abroad or the regions and countries to which you will be traveling. Get the appropriate shots and pills, and take the appropriate medications with you if your doctor thinks it's necessary. Find out about any potential side-effects of shots and pills that you may take. For information on illnesses that may be prevalent Abroad, please see the CDC link in the [Resources](#) section of this Handbook.

- **Physicals and Check-ups:** Get a complete physical, eye exam and dental check-up before going to Abroad. While health care is generally good Abroad, the quality of dental and medical care might be different in the various countries or regions you may visit. Also, they could possibly be more expensive than similar care in the United States.

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**Can You Drink the Water?:** Find out if water is generally safe to drink in different regions of Abroad and in the countries to which you will be traveling. To avoid diarrhea and other bacteria, purify questionable water before you drink it. Make sure water bottles come sealed when you buy them. Remember that ice can also be unsafe, as well as the water you use to brush your teeth.

- **Food Safety:** If you get diarrhea or food poisoning, remember to drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. As with any illness, consider seeing a doctor if your condition worsens. Give your body time to adjust to new types of foods you will be eating.
- **Laws and Codes of Conduct:** Make yourself aware of both the rules and regulations of your study abroad program sponsor, and the local laws and customs of Abroad and the countries which you will be

visiting. Understand that you will not only have to conform to the legal system of Abroad, but also obey the codes of conduct required of program participants. Also recognize that certain laws may vary from region to region or even city to city.



**Mental and Physical Health:** Consider your own mental and physical health issues when applying for a study abroad program, and make all your necessary health information available to your program's administrators in the U.S. and abroad so they can assist you with any special needs, or advise you on the risks you might face. Study abroad may include both physical and mental challenges for students, so make sure you establish a support network of program administrators, family and friends who can help you. According to the U.S. Department of State, "Good medical care is widely available."



**Prescriptions:** To be cautious, get a doctor's signed prescription for any medication you have to bring with you to Abroad, and get it translated into Abroad. However, if you can, take a supply large enough to cover your stay while abroad, just in case you can't fill your prescription while abroad. Contact the U.S. Embassy Abroad or your program administrator/advisor to find out if and how much U.S. prescription medication is allowed into Abroad. Also include a copy of your prescription for your glasses or contact lenses. Bring an extra pair of glasses.

- **First-Aid Kit:** Consider a well-stocked first-aid kit as a first line of defense. Some items to include are: sunscreen, bandages, flashlight, sterile pads, insect repellent, adhesive tape, aspirin, antacid, anti-diarrhea tablets, anti-malarial medication, extra bottled water, feminine protection, condoms, rubber gloves, etc.



**Fitness and Exercise:** Try to get fit in the time you have before departing for Abroad. A healthy body can help you fight off illness and recover faster if you do get sick. Even though it may be harder to follow a structured workout routine, try to stay fit while Abroad. Exercise also helps to increase energy levels and combat depression. Get a good pair of comfortable walking shoes. Without access to a car or public transportation Abroad, you may have to do quite a bit of walking. Break in your shoes before you go.

- **Emergency Contacts:** Keep your program staff and your emergency contacts at home and Abroad well informed of your whereabouts and activities, and provide these people with copies of your important travel documents (i.e. passport, visa, plane tickets, traveler's checks, and prescriptions, etc.).
- **Air Travel:** When you travel by air, drink a lot of non-alcoholic fluids, stay away from caffeine, eat light, and stretch often to avoid jetlag. Many airlines are now required to show an in-flight video of stretching exercises you can do on the plane in order to avoid the potential formation of blood clots, which can be caused by cabin pressure. A direct flight is usually easier for most travelers, but flights broken up by stops can also lessen jet lag.
- **Transportation:** Accidents involving in-country travel, whether by air, bus, train, taxi, car, etc., are a major cause of injury to students abroad. It is important to understand what the safe modes of travel are Abroad and in the countries to which you plan to travel. For more information on transportation Abroad, please visit the [U.S. Department of State](#).
  - **bus:** Since it is the cheapest way to travel (though rather tedious), travel by bus is often a very popular choice for students and travelers. However, since it is so slow, you may prefer to take the train. Often, if you can't find service to a particular location on national or regional buslines, local service should be able to take you to your desired destination.
  - **train/metro:** Travel by train is usually much faster than by bus, and can be a better option if you want to see more places in a short amount of time. You may want to avoid traveling by train alone at night, particularly in more urban areas. In major cities especially, you will find the metro system (where available) to be the most convenient form of transportation to move about the city, although beware of pickpockets.
  - **air:** Air travel can be a good value compared to a long bus ride. If you know of discount airfare websites, you can find tickets for less than a train ride would be. Especially if road travel is unsafe due to poor road conditions, and if train travel is too slow for your needs, then air travel can be a safe and pleasant option.
  - **cars:** While renting a car while studying while abroad can be a great way to see the countryside, it can also be a very stressful and dangerous way to travel. In countries where driving laws are significantly different than in the U.S., such as the UK or Hong Kong where drivers travel on the left side of the road or in other countries where you would experience a completely different driving environment, you should consider taking another form of transportation - especially if you feel hesitant at all about driving. U.S. driver's licenses are valid in most countries for up to 12 months. Insurance is required for all vehicles, including rental vehicles. You should obtain full coverage insurance when renting vehicles in any country - to make it easier, most rental places will arrange this beforehand. If a driver is involved in a vehicle accident resulting in damages or injuries to another party, the driver may be detained by local authorities until a settlement is arranged with the injured

party. Furthermore, depending upon the extent of damages or injuries to the other party, you may face charges filed by the court's judicial authorities.

For more health and safety information about driving abroad, the [Association for Safe International Road Travel](#) offers road travel reports, seasonal hazards, safety tips and common driver behaviors for travel abroad.

- **Alcohol and Drugs:** Use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad can increase the risk of accident and injury. Many study abroad accidents and injuries are related to the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad. Violating drug laws Abroad may result in very serious consequences. In some countries you may visit, being found guilty of violating drug laws can result in consequences as serious as death.
- **Setting an Example:** Set a good example. Remember you are like an ambassador for your U.S. college or university, as well as your culture and country. Behave in a way that is respectful of others' rights and well-being and encourage others to do the same.

## 4. Relevant Questions

- Who among the program staff should be informed of your travel plans, or who can serve as an emergency contact for your family back home?
- Who are your emergency contacts in the United States? Do they have copies of your important documents? Can they make decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so yourself (do they have power of attorney)?
- What health recommendations has the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently made for the country of your choice and the countries to which you will be traveling?
- Do you have any dietary restrictions? If so, do they pose a problem while in the country of your choice?
- How much walking will you be doing in the country of your choice? How can you prepare yourself for higher levels of physical activity?
- What should you carry in a first aid kit?
- What are the general sanitary conditions in the country of your choice? What kinds of precautions are necessary when drinking water or eating local food?
- Are there any specific immunizations you must get before entering the country of your choice and the countries to which you will travel?
- If you have any pre-existing health conditions, or you need to carry special medications abroad, what should you do before you go abroad?
- With whom can you leave copies of your important health-related documents?
- Will your prescription drug(s) be legal and/or available in the country of your choice?
- What is the generic name, and a citizen of the country of your choice for your medication?
- Does the staff speak English, a citizen of the country of your choice, and other indigenous languages fluently to communicate the nature of any medical conditions? (Remember, many indigenous groups in the country of your choice might not speak a citizen of the country of your choice or English.)

- Can your program provide for any special needs you may have (wheelchair ramps, un-timed tests, etc.)?
- Do you have access to adequate medical facilities?
- What is the cost of typical medical services?
- What specific travel advisories has the U.S. Department of State recently issued for the country of your choice and the other countries to which you will be traveling?
- What types of crimes are common in the area/city where you will be studying and living?
- What activities increase the risk of accidents and injury abroad?
- How extensive, safe, and reliable is the public transportation system in the country of your choice and the others countries to which you will be traveling?

## 5. Checklist

- Before leaving, I have gotten a complete physical from my doctor.
- I have received all necessary immunizations required/recommended for entry to the countries I will visit, and I know where to obtain other inoculations abroad if needed later.
- I know who the emergency contact will be at the U.S. and in the country of your choice.
- I know who my emergency contact will be at home.
- I have asked whether or not the drinking water is safe to drink in the country of your choice.
- I know what precautions to take when eating local food.
- I have researched where to buy food that suits my dietary needs/restrictions (i.e. for vegetarians, diabetics, etc...).
- I know how extensive, safe and reliable the public transportation system is in the country of your choice.
- I am aware of the laws and codes of conduct that are likely to impact me.
- I understand that the use of alcohol and drugs increases my risk of accident and injury.

## 6. Resources

- [AllAbroad.us](http://AllAbroad.us) – [Health](#) Mentors address any health concerns that students may have while overseas.