

Health and Safety Abroad

Helping to ensure the health and safety of Northwestern students abroad is one of the top priorities of the Northwestern Study Abroad Office. The best way that students can prepare for a healthy and safe study abroad experience is to inform themselves about basic health and safety issues before leaving the U. S.

We encourage students to read this section very carefully and spend some time browsing the resources and Web sites linked here. Also, make sure to read any pre-departure information that you receive from your program provider or on-site director. Before you leave to study abroad, learn what resources are available to you once you're abroad. For instance, if you are in an area experiencing some turmoil, you should log on to the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Web site every day (www.state.gov). Or, as you plan your side trips, you should visit both the State Department site as well as the National Center for Infectious Diseases: Travelers' Health Web site because some countries require that you get immunizations well in advance of your trip. In addition, this site posts any updates regarding health conditions abroad, such as SARS, AIDS and Malaria.

Of course, no one can guarantee that you will be completely healthy and safe abroad, just as no one can guarantee that you'll be healthy and safe in Evanston. However, there are lots of things that you can do to prepare for your time abroad. In particular, we urge outbound students to attend our Health and Safety Orientation, offered every fall and spring quarters the hour before our mandatory pre-departure orientations. Summaries of our health and safety presentations are available on the Web at: <http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/students/prospective/health/healthsaferesources.html>.

Once you are abroad, make sure to exercise due caution: by following the advice of your on-site directors, staying abreast of local conditions, seeking additional information regarding your study abroad country and any other countries to which you plan to travel, monitoring your own health, and staying in touch with your program, the Northwestern Study Abroad Office and your parents, should a crisis arise.

The information provided in this section gives you starting points in your preparation for a healthy and safe study abroad experience. Please contact the Study Abroad Office if you have further questions. Remember: your health and safety abroad largely depends on the responsible decisions you make before you leave and while you're abroad.

Study Abroad and Travel Warnings: Northwestern's Policies

The U. S. State Department regularly issues Travel Warnings for countries it determines are unsafe for American citizens. Students who wish to study abroad in a country on the Travel Warning list are subject to the University's Travel Warning policy. To read this policy, please visit: <http://www.northwestern.edu/risk/travelwarning.htm>.

Students who are already abroad on a program administered by Northwestern University or affiliated programs may be required to return to the U.S. if the Department of State issues a warning that applies to the country in which they are studying. The University will work with these students, their families, and the programs to decide the best course of action at that time. Northwestern has established this policy as part of our continuing efforts to provide a safe and beneficial experience for our students who participate in study abroad programs and trips. For a complete list of all current Travel Warnings, see http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html

Monitoring World Events

There are times when it is difficult to assess the impact of world events on specific study abroad locations. The Northwestern Study Abroad Office does its best to help you and your parents assess these situations, whether they occur before you leave for study abroad or while you're there. We receive all routine and emergency postings from the U.S. Department of State's list-serv, which issues periodic "Public Announcements" and, when appropriate, more serious "Travel Warnings" about situations that pose potential dangers to Americans abroad. We also monitor private intelligence services. If students are

currently studying abroad when a Travel Warning is posted, we will work with them to determine the best course of action, which may require that they return to the U.S.

When the Department of State issues a Public Announcement or a Travel Warning about a specific country or region, the Study Abroad Office takes several precautions before we contact outbound students or students who are abroad. First, we contact the U.S. offices of the study abroad programs located in the affected countries. Programs are in close contact with their on-site directors, who can provide the most up-to-date information on local conditions and inform us of what steps they may be taking abroad. If warranted, we call or email on-site program contacts and other study abroad administrators for more information. For our exchange programs, we contact our partner universities abroad to gather more information and learn their recommendations. In the case of our summer programs, we contact the faculty directors in the affected countries. Directors and universities abroad, in turn, will be in touch with the local Embassy or Consulate. Once we have assessed the situation as thoroughly as possible, we contact our students abroad as well as provide information to outbound students. This information generally includes copies of the Department of State announcements, along with recommended steps for students to take abroad. If the Department of State posts a Travel Warning for a particular country, outbound students will be subject to the University's Travel Warning policy, which can be found at: <http://www.northwestern.edu/risk/travelwarning.htm>.

We do our very best to reach every one of our students impacted by such events; but not everyone has daily email access or cell phones, and students currently abroad are sometimes traveling.

In the event that a situation arises where there is political unrest or threats have been made against U.S. interests abroad, your first step should be to contact your program administrators on site. If, for any reason, you are unable to reach your program director or staff, you should call the Northwestern Study Abroad Office at 847-467-6400 or email us at studyabroad@northwestern.edu. You should keep a list of emergency contact numbers (such as your on-site contacts, and emergency U.S. contacts in case you can't reach anyone on-site) on you at all times while abroad.

Rest assured that everyone in the Study Abroad Office will work closely with you and your program and do everything in our power to assist you. Please contact us at any time if you or your parents have any questions.

Your Health and Safety Responsibilities

Things to Do Before You Leave

❑ Consult the Northwestern Travel Clinic

Most immunizations and health precautions aren't mandatory, but provide valuable protection for people who wish to travel in good health. Make an appointment with the Northwestern Travel Clinic (847.491.8100) at least eight weeks prior to departure, as some vaccines are administered as a series and thus require multiple visits to the Clinic. Although your own family healthcare provider may be able to administer routine immunizations such as Tetanus and perhaps Hepatitis A, most offices don't stock specialized vaccines such as Typhoid. The Northwestern Travel Clinic, on the other hand, does stock these. At your Travel Clinic appointment, the nurse will determine what vaccines you'll need based on your travel itinerary, administer the vaccines, and discuss general travel health issues with you.

Make sure you understand any particular health risks or precautions for your destination. The Centers for Disease Control provides current information for every country in the world: www.cdc.gov.

Please visit www.nuhs.northwestern.edu/vaccine.html for a list of vaccinations offered by the Northwestern Travel Clinic, along with current prices.

NOTE: The Northwestern Travel Clinic does not administer the Yellow Fever vaccine.

❑ Get Medical Examinations

We strongly recommend that all students participating in study abroad have medical examinations prior to departure. Illness will negatively impact your study abroad experience, so it's best to take care of a pre-existing condition before you depart.

❑ Update Your Prescriptions

Students who use prescription medications (including allergy shots, eye glasses or contacts, and birth control pills) should carry an adequate supply and an updated prescription accompanied by a signed and dated statement from the prescribing health care provider. The statement should indicate the generic name and brand name of the medication, as well as the dosage and any major health problems you have. This will provide vital information for medical authorities in case of an emergency, and will also facilitate your interactions with customs. Students should also take an extra pair of glasses or lenses and a card, tag, or bracelet that identifies any physical condition that may require emergency care.

Pack your prescriptions in your carry-on luggage in the original, labeled container. Make sure your name on the prescription appears the same way it does on your passport.

If you need to take a prescription drug throughout the duration of the program but cannot bring an adequate supply with you, talk with your doctor about how you will obtain the remainder of your prescription abroad. If you plan to purchase medication overseas, you will need to see a host country physician for a new prescription and should know the generic name of your medication, as the exact same medication is sometimes not available overseas. *Note:* Do not plan to have medicines or vitamins mailed to you because they may be held up in customs. It is a good idea to check with your insurance provider about what is covered in terms of prescriptions and office visits while abroad.

❑ Know the Laws Regarding Your Medication

Students who are taking prescribed medications for depression/anxiety/OCD or ADD/ADHD should know that in some countries, the drugs often used to treat these conditions are severely restricted or even illegal. If this is an issue, make sure to talk to your physician and research your alternative options well before going abroad.

❑ AIDS and Sexual Health

The HIV virus is prevalent everywhere in the world. To protect yourself, do not have unprotected sex and do not use drugs intravenously or share needles for any reason. We strongly recommend that students pack condoms, since they are not always widely available overseas. Overall, we encourage students to be cautious about their sexual activity while abroad.

❑ Report Medical Conditions

If you have or have had any medical or psychological conditions that may require treatment while you are overseas, please be sure to indicate this on any Health History Form that may be given you by your specific program before you depart. If you do not receive this type of pre-departure material, we encourage you to inform your program of any medical or psychological conditions regardless. The stress of being overseas may cause conditions for which you have successfully been treated in the past to recur. If you have any questions or concerns about this possibility, consult your physician. Also, you should write down your blood type before you go and keep it in your wallet in case that information is ever needed.

❑ Disabilities

Students who have disabilities should discuss their study abroad plans with both a Study Abroad Adviser and also with Northwestern's Services for Students with Disabilities. Margie Roe at Services for Students with Disabilities is available to speak with students and can be reached at 847-491-2960 or m-roe@northwestern.edu. A Study Abroad Adviser can help students pick a program that will best fit their individual needs. To schedule an appointment with an Adviser, please call the Study Abroad Office at 847-467-6400. Please also visit our web page concerning

disabilities abroad:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/students/prospective/diversity/disabilities.html>.

Health and Safety Packing Tips

Miscellaneous Items to Include

Certain necessities or brands may be difficult to obtain, or may be significantly more expensive overseas. Thus, consider taking the following items with you and when applicable, packing them in your carry-on luggage for customs:

Personal Items

- Feminine hygiene products
- Contraceptives and prescription birth control
- Contact lens solutions
- Syringes for allergy treatment, insulin, or other medical injections
- Extra pair of glasses or contact lenses (know your lens prescription before you go in case you lose these!)
- Medical kit in carry-on bag

Insect Repellants

- Permethrins: clothing treatment—dip or spray and it lasts for two to three weeks even if you wash your clothes

Medical Kit Suggestions

- Pepto-Bismol or Imodium AD
- Band-aids, Moleskin
- Thermometer
- Sunscreen, Sunburn medication
- Aspirin/aspirin free product
- Cough and cold medicine
- A mild laxative
- Antifungal/anti itch agent
- Antibacterial cream/spray
- Bee sting kit
- Water shoes
- Water purification systems, if necessary, and know how to use them ahead of time.

Helpful On-site Health and Safety Tips

Things to do Upon Arrival

☐ Drink Water

On the flight to your host country, remember that jet lag can be worsened by dehydration. Caffeine and alcohol contribute to dehydration, so drink plenty of water (start with bottled if you're unsure how your system will handle the tap water in your new environment). Some things to keep in mind concerning water, beverages, and foods:

- If you are in a country where you must drink bottled water, break the seals yourself.
- Remember ice cubes could be made of unfiltered water and a chance for infection. Brushing your teeth with tap water is not advisable in places where you must drink bottled water.
- Watch for un-pasteurized milk, and raw fruits and vegetables that may be washed in unclean water.
- Watch for raw or undercooked meat, shellfish, or un-refrigerated foods and dairy – food storage temperature requirements overseas are often less enforced than they are here.

❑ **Know Your Local Health Services**

Know how to access health services, both for routine care and emergencies. This information will be provided to you during your on-site orientation; if it is not, please ask your Faculty Director, program provider, on-site coordinator, or the Study Abroad Office.

❑ **Know Your Health Insurance Policy and Procedures**

Carry your insurance card with you at all times. Take your claim forms with you whenever you travel. No reimbursements can be made without a completed claim form and appropriate backup documentation. If you require medical attention, be sure that you have access to adequate funds to cover a health emergency, which you will likely have to pay for up front, and that you have read the terms and conditions of your insurance policy carefully. Please make sure a parent or guardian has a copy of your insurance card and policy.

❑ **Eat Well, Exercise Regularly, and Get Adequate Sleep**

An important part of maintaining your health while you're abroad is eating properly. In addition to maintaining a healthy diet abroad, you should also exercise regularly. You'll find that you get quite a bit of exercise by simply walking more than you normally do. The first few days in your study abroad location will be very exciting, and you may be tempted to overdo it. Remember that in addition to the psychological and cultural adjustment you will be experiencing, your body will also be going through a physical adjustment to a new climate, a new time zone, new food, etc. Make sure to get plenty of sleep, especially in the very beginning of your program.

❑ **Miscellaneous Suggestions**

If Diarrhea Occurs

- Avoid solid foods and dairy products for 24 hours
- Drink liquids to prevent dehydration
- Take Pepto-Bismol or Imodium (avoid Pepto-Bismol if sensitive to aspirin.)
- If you have a fever, abdominal pain or bloody stools, seek help

Car and Vehicle Travel

- Use seatbelts if possible
- Don't drive at night
- Don't ever drive while intoxicated (even if your host country does not have laws against it)

Swimming

- Swim in marked swimming areas, chlorinated water is best
- Beware of fresh water swimming, especially near sewer mouths
- You can swim in oceans, but again, beware of sewer mouths
- Don't swim alone, while intoxicated, or at night
- Avoid walking barefoot

Emergencies Abroad

An emergency is an occurrence or situation that poses a genuine and sometimes immediate risk to your health and well being. It's always a good idea to make sure that key members of your family have valid passports in case you have an emergency abroad that requires one of them to travel to your host country. Should an emergency occur, first contact your on-site director. If you can't reach this person and the emergency requires you to contact the Study Abroad Office please call 847-467-6400 or 847-491-8293. If you need to reach the Study Abroad Office and have an emergency after normal business hours, call the University Police at 847-491-3254. They will then contact a Study Abroad Office staff member who will call you back.

Emergencies at Home

Should an emergency arise at home while a student is abroad (for example, a family member falls ill, a terrorist attack occurs, etc), it is critical that your family or friends at home know how to get in touch with

you abroad—especially if you are away from your program city or the program has ended. If you choose to travel during free weekends or after a program ends, please contact your family every couple of days either by phone or email to let them know where you are and how you can be reached.

Staying Safe Abroad

Some parents and students focus their safety concerns on terrorism and civil unrest abroad. In reality, however, it's much less likely for students to be hurt in a terrorist act, for example, than in more mundane situations, such as traffic accidents. For instance, it is common for Americans to look the wrong direction when crossing a street in London or Australia because traffic moves in the opposite direction from traffic in the U.S. This is a frequent mistake that can be deadly.

In a foreign culture, it is more challenging to read situations and to assess risks to your physical safety than it is at home. In other words, you can no longer rely completely on your "common sense" to get a feel for what kind of situation you're in and how you might deal with it. At a minimum, you must be aware that some behaviors that may be culturally and legally acceptable and seemingly safe at home may not be safe (or legal) in your host country. There are four things that you can think about to develop your own, personal strategies for staying safe while abroad. They involve understanding culture and politics, understanding yourself, and trying to fit in, i.e., not look like a tourist.

Developing Strategies for Staying Safe

1. *Understand the cultural and political environments of the countries you're going to.*

You will be living in the midst of these environments, which means that you must understand what they are, where you fit into it as an American, a student, a male/female, etc. and how others will view you and your behavior within the context of these environments.

Questions for thought:

- How do host nationals generally see Americans? What are the stereotypes/general sentiments? How should this affect your behavior?
- What are people's attitudes in these countries about gender relations, race, sexuality, etc.? How are these attitudes reflected in the host country's laws?
- What are your own stereotypes/views of the people in the country where you're going? Are they accurate? How will they affect your behavior?

2. *Think about what you like to do in daily life here that you plan to continue doing while living abroad. Then come up with some strategies for how to go about doing these things in the foreign country where you'll be living, including how to modify your own behavior, if necessary.*

Questions for thought:

- Is there something that you do every day, e.g., go jogging or stay at the library until late at night?
- What do you tend to do on weekends? How often do you go out at night, and what time do you usually come home?
- What should you think about/research/check into before doing these same things abroad? Is there anything you do here that you perhaps shouldn't do in the country where you're going?

3. *Figure out what you can do to BLEND IN so that you're not targeted as a tourist.*

Questions for thought:

- What behaviors would identify you as a "tourist"?
- How can you avoid acting like a tourist abroad?
- What will be "firsts" for you, e.g., taking a long train trip alone, eating alone in a restaurant, reading a map in a foreign language, etc.? How can you prepare for these situations before you leave so you understand how to handle them abroad without standing out? If possible, try rehearsing these things before you leave for abroad so that you can figure out how to do them in a comfortable manner.

4. *Identify your instincts, and learn to pay attention to them and trust them.*

Questions for thought:

- What types of specific situations make you feel uncomfortable or just feel out of the ordinary?
- Are you worried about encountering any specific unsafe or uncomfortable situations abroad? If so, what are they?
- How do you know, physically, mentally, and emotionally, when you feel uncomfortable? For example, does your heart start to beat quickly? Do you start perspiring? What tips you off to the fact that "something's not right"?
- What do you do if you feel like you're getting into one of these situations, or if you're already in one?
- When in a situation that makes you endangered, always trust your instincts. Even if you feel that doing so may cause you to act in a way that may be regarded as culturally insensitive, it is important to trust your gut. If something feels uncomfortable, don't do it.

Additional Safety Suggestions While Abroad

Americans have a reputation abroad as being easy targets for theft and assault. Therefore, it is important that you use good judgment and caution when navigating your new environment. Here are some general tips to help you stay safe:

- Carry your Emergency Contact Card and your ID with you at *all* times.
- Don't draw attention to yourself as a foreigner/American. College sweatshirts, baseball caps, and the like could be bad clothing choices in an area with strong anti-American sentiment.
- Know how to ask for help in the native language of the country.
- Know local emergency telephone numbers.
- Don't dangle purses or cameras from your wrist.
- If you choose to bring an Ipad or MP3 Player abroad, conceal these as best as possible. They are quickly becoming a target for theft both in the US and abroad. Consider using alternative headphones other than the white ones that are sold with the Ipods's, as they have become a trademark give-away and attract more attention. Backpacks, laptops, and big purses can also be targets.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash. Don't carry all of your money and documents in one bag or in back pockets. Consider wearing a money pouch.
- Be alert in crowds, especially in train stations or popular tourist attractions, because thieves often use distractions in these locations to their advantage.
- Don't hitchhike.
- Don't rent cars, motorcycles, mopeds, or scooters.
- Don't stay out late at night.
- When traveling long distances by train or bus, attach your bag to the luggage rack with a bike chain or lock.
- U.S. foreign policy affects how people overseas will treat you. You will often be seen as a representative of your country—whether you want to be one or not. If your travel destination is having political or military difficulties, ranging from demonstrations to terrorist attacks to civil war, stay away from all sites of such activity.

Safety Resources

- <http://www.cdc.gov/>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Health recommendations and precautions for travelers.
- www.hthstudents.com
HTH Insurance Company: Your health insurance provider that can assist with locating English-speaking physicians worldwide and has information about health conditions in certain regions.
- <http://travel.state.gov/>
The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs: Essential information about travel safety advisories, crisis assistance to U.S. citizens abroad, U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, and passport services.
- <http://travel.state.gov/links.html>
The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs: Links to U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide.
- <http://travel.state.gov/studentinfo.html>

- The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs: Tips for students.
http://travel.state.gov/spring_break.html
- The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs: Spring/summer break tips for students.
http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html
- The U.S. Department of State: Background notes and interesting facts about countries around the world.
<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>
- The Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook: Profiles and maps of every country in the world.
<http://www.embassy.org/>
- The Electronic Embassy: Lists the home pages of all embassies in Washington D.C.
<http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/globaled/studentsabroad/>
- Center for Global Education Study Abroad Safety Handbook: Information about culture shock, medical care abroad, and advice for students and parents
http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/globaled/safeti/v1n2_oneill.html#safetyconcerns
- Center for Global Education SAFETI Newsletter: Safety tips for student travelers
http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/globaled/safeti/v2n1_hoffa.html
- Center for Global Education SAFETI Newsletter: Advice for parents
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/>
- British Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Lists travel advisories and country profiles that are not released by the U.S. Department of State
<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/>
- Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade: Lists travel advisories and country profiles that are not released by the U.S. Department of State

Sexual Harassment

Although what you might perceive as sexual harassment in the U.S. may be considered socially acceptable in another country, cross-cultural sensitivity does not include relaxing your personal boundaries. If you feel you have been a victim of sexual harassment, you should immediately inform the on-site director, or call the Study Abroad Office at 847-467-6400. Your situation will be handled confidentially, with the facts made available only to those who need to know in order to investigate or resolve the matter. Keep in mind, however, that while Northwestern University considers sexual harassment unacceptable and treats the behavior accordingly on campus and on all Northwestern-sponsored programs, the University's policies and jurisdiction do not extend beyond the programs. Therefore, if you have questions concerning your interactions with people outside of your program, please raise those with your on-site coordinator.

For more details about sexual harassment, please consult the following Web sites:

- http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/globaled/safeti/v1n2_newport.html
Center for Global Education SAFETI Newsletter: Information from a former Peace Corps volunteer about sexual harassment and prevention abroad.
- www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment
Northwestern University Sexual Harassment Prevention Office: Details about Northwestern's sexual harassment policy and how to get help if you encounter sexual harassment.

Responding to Physical or Sexual Assault

Assault is a traumatic event that can occur in any environment, whether in the U.S. or abroad. However, as an international traveler, you may be more visible than you are accustomed to being and thus more likely to attract interest, whether positive or negative. While physical or sexual assault is not always preventable, we urge you to take every possible precaution and use good judgment.

If you are assaulted, please remember that it was not your fault, and you're not alone. You should do the following if you are a victim of an assault:

1. Go to a safe place
2. Don't shower or change clothes
3. Get help from a trusted person
4. Inform your Faculty Director or on-site administrator
5. Follow the guidance of the Faculty Director or on-site administrator for medical, psychological, and legal support

It is critical that you inform your on-site director of any incident. S/he can help in a variety of ways, including providing support for you while you make choices about what to do next. This person may assist you in contacting your family if you wish to inform them and connecting you with local sources of emotional support. You can also contact the Counseling and Psychological Services Office (CAPS) at Northwestern, which is very experienced with these sorts of situations. Their after hours number is 847-491-8100, and their daytime number is 847-491-2151.

Gender and Women's Issues Abroad

There are two primary reasons to consider gender within the context of health and safety abroad. The first reason is that women have specific safety concerns, both at home and abroad. Although men are also the targets of muggings and other crimes, women are often seen as easy or fragile victims and are more often the targets of sexual assaults. Therefore, women should remain extra vigilant while abroad and do their best to prevent themselves from ending up in a possibly threatening situation.

The second reason to consider gender while abroad relates to how cultural expectations and practices often result in well-defined gender roles within a society. Gender roles abroad may differ greatly from those in the U.S. You may not choose to behave in exactly the same ways as traditional local women or men do; however, it's important to educate yourself about cultural gender roles within your host community in order to make sensitive choices about how you will behave as a woman or a man while abroad, and to understand how your personal views and opinions may be interpreted by your host culture. Think about ways to deal with intercultural frustrations relating to gender and/or being a woman overseas, including your response to people's possible stereotypes of you as an American woman. American women have a reputation in many countries as being looser, more carefree, and often more relaxed with their personal boundaries (i.e. "easy"). This opinion is often created/reinforced by American television shows, music, and films. To find out more information on being an American woman abroad, and to see past study abroad female students' comments please visit: http://www.umich.edu/~icenter/overseas/study/women_abroad.html.

Overwhelmingly, female students suggest that women abroad be alert and assertive if any unwelcome attention surfaces, and consider dressing a bit more conservatively than they might at home.

Relationships Abroad

The "rules" of dating vary from culture to culture. Your behavior in some situations may be viewed differently than if you behaved the exact same way at home. For example, accepting a drink that someone buys you in certain countries may come with more social "obligations" than it would in America. It is important that you consider your behavior and inform yourself as best as possible about how dating and relationships generally function in your host culture. This knowledge will help you to better identify and act in situations that make you uncomfortable either physically or psychologically.

Women (and men) are encouraged to learn basic self-defense techniques before they go, as these skills will be valuable to them while they travel and also when they return home to Evanston. Northwestern University offers free self-defense courses frequently throughout the year on both the Evanston and Chicago campuses specifically for women. These classes are sponsored and taught by a division of the Northwestern University Police Department, called Rape Aggression Defense (RAD). Please visit <http://www.northwestern.edu/up/prevention/rad.html> or call 847-491-3254 to find out how to sign up. You can also call the Study Abroad Office at 847-467-6400 for information on other affordable self-defense classes in the Evanston/Chicago area.

Sexual Orientation

You may already identify yourself as a heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender student, or you may still be exploring these issues. In either case, you will find that the social climate, laws, and personal interactions of your host culture often differ from the U.S.

In some cultures, Western understandings of “gay” and “straight” don’t exist, or don’t carry the same importance as they do in the U.S. People involved in same-sex relationships may not see this behavior or preference as an identity. In other cultures, there are active social movements for civil rights for sexual minorities. In preparing for your study abroad experience, it may be important for you to research the LGBT climate of the country you will be visiting. Though it might seem intimidating to research these kinds of issues, it will help you be better prepared to face the world you will encounter. Even if you do not plan to have a sexual relationship while away, you should be informed about specific laws pertaining to sexual behavior and sexual/gender orientation. When doing your research, try to ascertain:

- The legality of same-sex sexual behavior (sometimes male-male sexual behavior is illegal while female-female sexual behavior is not)
- The age of consent for sexual behavior (which may differ from the age of consent for opposite-sex sexual behavior)
- Restrictions on freedom of association or expression for LGBT people
- Anti-discrimination laws (these can be national laws or specific to local areas)
- Sodomy laws

You may find that you can be freer in your behavior than in the U.S., or that you need to hide your sexual preferences completely to avoid cultural ostracism or arrest. Please feel free to contact the Study Abroad Office to discuss any concerns. Many of us have attended the Safe Space program, and we would be happy to talk to you.

For more resources on this topic, see the following Web sites:

- <http://www.indiana.edu/%7Eoverseas/lesbigay/>
NAFSA - Rainbow Special Interest Group: A comprehensive site on issues of concern to lesbian and gay participants in international exchange and travel.
- <http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/students/prospective/diversity/sexualorientation.html>
The Northwestern Study Abroad Office: Links to articles, books, and campus resources for students who would like information about sexual orientation and study abroad.

Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnic relations are also culturally determined, which means that while you’re abroad, you may be part of an ethnic minority for the first time in your life. The ethnic identity you have always felt to be an integral part of yourself may be viewed in a completely different way in your host country. Those of you visiting a country where you have ethnic or racial roots may be expected to behave according to the host country norms in a way that other Americans of a different background are not. Perhaps you’ll be considered American first, and your ethnic or racial identity will be considered unimportant. In many countries, there are homegrown ethnic or racial conflicts, and you may be identified with one group or another because of your physical appearance, until people discover you are American. It is extremely unlikely that any of these situations will involve any threat of physical harm to you as an international student; however, you should prepare yourself for the situations you may encounter by researching the situation in your host country. Upon request, the Study Abroad Office staff can try to put you in contact with a student or faculty member at Northwestern who has experience in your host country and can address these issues with you.

For more information about race and ethnicity issues abroad, see the following Web site:

- <http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/students/prospective/diversity/race.html>
The Northwestern Study Abroad Office: Links to articles, books, and campus resources about race and ethnicity issues abroad.

Stereotypes Abroad

Stereotypes and safety are intrinsically linked. Like it or not, your reputation precedes you when you travel abroad. Many Americans have traveled before you, and although not all fit the list of stereotypes below, it only takes a few to make an impression stick.

Here are some of the most common stereotypes of Americans held by people in other countries:

Americans are outgoing, friendly, informal, loud, hard working, extravagant, wealthy, wasteful, confident, egocentric, ethnocentric, ignorant, disrespectful of authority, always in a hurry, generous, immature, rude, promiscuous (women especially).

Think carefully about these qualities, and about how people may have arrived at these assumptions. Consider how you (as an American) may be perceived in your host country before you even open your mouth. Remember that your behavior abroad is not just representative of you, but also of the U.S., Americans, Northwestern, your community, and your family – and can have direct effects on your safety while abroad.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities are increasingly participating in study abroad programs around the world. As with the other issues mentioned above, the key to a successful experience is advance planning. Understand, however, that attitudes, accessibility, and accommodation for students with emotional, mental, learning, or physical disabilities may vary at different program sites. Think about how you will cope with these differences, and seek as much information as possible before you depart. One possible source of information would be to find people with similar disabilities in your host country. The Study Abroad Office may be able to help you connect with someone on-site who can offer firsthand information about this topic.

Most importantly, students who have disabilities should discuss their study abroad plans with both a Study Abroad Adviser and also with Northwestern's Services for Students with Disabilities *before they go*. Margie Roe at Services for Students with Disabilities is available to speak with students and can be reached at 847-491-2960 or m-roe@northwestern.edu. A Study Abroad Adviser can help students pick a program that will best fit their individual needs. To schedule an appointment with an Adviser, please call the Study Abroad Office at 847-467-6400. Please also visit our web page concerning disabilities abroad: <http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/students/prospective/diversity/disabilities.html>.

For more information about student disabilities and study abroad, see the following Web sites:

- <http://www.miusa.org/>
Mobility International USA: Information on education and travel abroad for people with disabilities. Includes extensive links to related organizations worldwide and to providers of travel services for people with disabilities.
- <http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/access/>
The University of Minnesota: A comprehensive source of information about students with disabilities who wish to study abroad.
- <http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/students/prospective/diversity/disabilities.html>
The Northwestern Study Abroad Office: Links to articles, books, and campus resources for students with disabilities who wish to study abroad.

Alcohol and Drug Use Abroad

Alcohol

When studying abroad, you will most likely be going to a location where you will be of legal drinking age in that country. While distance from home may lessen your inhibitions, you are encouraged to use good judgment if you choose to consume alcoholic beverages while studying abroad. Excessive and irresponsible drinking leading to intoxication and behavior that interferes with the rights of others is subject to immediate disciplinary action, including termination from the program, parental notification, and return home at your own expense. Students who use alcohol must do so responsibly while studying abroad.

In general, avoid over-indulging which is a real danger in a foreign country where the beer may be stronger and cheaper. Be aware of the customs of the country. Drinking to get drunk is rarely acceptable, even in countries where alcohol is consumed with every meal. Remember that “drugging” is not at all uncommon in situations where alcohol is involved. To try to prevent this, always try to buy your own drinks. Never go home with a stranger. Always go out with at least one friend (especially if you are a woman), and return with that friend if possible.

Drugs

Despite what you may have heard about looser drug laws outside of the U.S., drugs are illegal in most countries around the world. In fact, drug laws are often stricter outside U.S. borders. In several countries, including Thailand, China, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Turkey, possession of even a relatively small amount of illegal drugs can be grounds for the death penalty. In several others, including Mexico and the Dominican Republic, it can be grounds for mandatory jail sentences. In addition, in some countries it can be illegal to even enter the country with drugs still in your system. This is called “internal possession” and is grounds for prosecution similar to what you would endure if you actually physically possessed drugs. Police or customs in these countries can demand a urine sample upon entry to the country without any reasonable cause. If they find that you have taken drugs in another country and are entering their country with these drugs in your system, you may find yourself in an extremely unfavorable position. Once you have ventured beyond U.S. borders, U.S. laws or constitutional rights no longer protect you. Thus, **DO NOT** do drugs abroad! The penalties are much too dangerous.

An Excerpt from U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs/American Citizens Services

Each year, more than 2,500 American citizens are arrested abroad. Half are arrested on narcotics charges, including possession of very small amounts of illegal substances. Some young people are victimized because they may be unaware of the laws, customs, or standards of the country they are visiting. From Asia to Africa, Europe to South America, U.S. citizens are finding out the hard way that drug possession or trafficking equals jail in foreign countries.

There is very little that anyone can do to help you if you are caught with drugs. It is your responsibility to know what the drug laws are in a foreign country before you go, because "I didn't know it was illegal" will not get you out of jail. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women arrested abroad. The rise is a result of women who serve as drug couriers or "mules" in the belief they can make quick money and have a vacation without getting caught. Instead of a short vacation, they get a lengthy stay or life sentence in a foreign jail. Important to Note: If you are purchasing prescription medications in quantities larger than that considered necessary for personal use, you could be arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking.

Besides drugs, alcohol can also get U.S. citizens in trouble abroad. Students have been arrested for being intoxicated in public areas, for underage drinking, and for drunk driving. Some young Americans go abroad assuming that local authorities will overlook such conduct. Many believe that they are immune from prosecution in foreign countries because they are American citizens. The truth is that Americans are expected to obey all of the laws of the countries they visit, and those who break these laws sometimes face severe penalties, including prison sentences. Being arrested is not the only thing that can happen on a

foreign vacation. Young Americans have suffered injury or even death from automobile accidents, drowning and falls, in addition to other mishaps. While these accidents are sometimes chance occurrences, many are caused by alcohol or drug abuse. Sadly, other Americans have been raped or robbed because they have found themselves in unfamiliar locales or are incapable of exercising prudent judgment while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Legal Issues

If you ever get into legal trouble abroad, you should immediately contact your on-site director. You may also contact a Consular officer at your local U.S. Embassy abroad. However, their ability to help in some situations is limited.

A U.S. Consular officer can:

- Visit you in jail after being notified of your arrest
- Give you a list of local attorneys
- Notify your family or friends and relay requests for money or other aid with your authorization
- Intercede with the local authorities to ensure that you are treated humanely and ensure that your rights under local law are fully observed

The U.S. Embassy personnel also provide routine citizenship services (such as passport replacement) and emergency assistance for American citizens abroad, and provide assistance to Americans abroad and their families in cases of death, serious medical emergency, and legal difficulties.

The U.S. Consular officer cannot:

- Get you out of jail
- Represent you at trial or give legal counsel
- Pay legal fees or fines with U.S. government funds