

## International Travel Safety Information for Students

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Each year, more than 2,500 American citizens are arrested abroad -- about half on narcotics charges, including possession of very small amounts of illegal substances. A drug that is legal in one country may not be legal in a neighboring nation. Some young people are victimized because they are unaware of the laws, customs, or standards of the country they are visiting.

Besides drugs, alcohol can also cause trouble for U.S. citizens traveling 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.

Disorderly or reckless behavior is also to be avoided. In many countries, conduct that would not result in an arrest in the United States constitutes a violation of local law. Being arrested is not the only misfortune that can occur 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 sexually assaulted 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.

Other hidden safety issues are of major concern as well. Because standards of security, safety and supervision are not the same in many countries as they are in the U.S., many young persons have died after automobile accidents, after falls from balconies, after falls into open ditches, by drowning in the ocean as well as in hotel pools, and in water-sports mishaps, among others. In some countries, the water sports industry is not carefully regulated. Unlicensed operators have been linked to assaults, and a number of Americans have been killed or injured by the improper use of jet-skis and other personal watercraft. It is crucial that young Americans be aware of these risks as they are enjoying their time abroad.

Young Americans traveling abroad should remember that reckless behavior while in another country can do more than ruin their vacation; it can land them in a foreign jail, cause them to suffer physical harm, or worse. It is possible to have a safe and fun trip if they avoid risky behavior and become familiar with the basic laws and customs of the country they plan to visit before they travel.

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