**Top Ten Ways to Not Become a Victim of Crime Around the World**
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**Real World Rescue—High Risk Travel Security Consultants**

There is a popular myth that traveling abroad is safer than being in the United States.  This is simply false.  Although violent crime is clearly prevalent, the U.S. has one of the lowest violent crime rates in the world.  Each country, region, and city abroad has its areas and ways that are more safe or less safe than the part of the US where you live.

While crime is a reality in every country, travel overseas introduces Americans to new types of risk.  As a rule, people are more likely to be targeted by criminals when they are in unfamiliar surroundings and unskilled at interpreting events around them.  For Americans with limited international travel experience, many parts of the world represent just this kind of environment.  Exacerbating the incidence of crime against travelers is the poverty in many countries that fuels robbery and theft.

Following are ten points American travelers should adhere to when exploring the globe:

1.  <u>Don't be an obvious foreigner</u>.   In many parts of the developing world, you'll stand out no matter what you do, but make an effort to blend in as much as you can and respect local norms.  The standard advice applies: T-shirts with corporate logos or flashy clothes are better left at home.  Loud or boisterous behavior also advertises your presence in a negative way.  Be a careful observer before you jump into the game.

2.  <u>Leave jewelry at home</u>.   Robert Young Pelton, author of *The World's Most Dangerous Places*, captures perceptions of Westerners in the developing world this way: "as obvious as a naked man with hundred-dollar bills taped to his body." Wear local, inexpensive jewelry if you must look beautiful.

3.  <u>Keep copies of your passport and hide the original</u>.   Carry three copies of your passport; keep two in separate areas of your baggage, and carry one on your body.  Put the original in the safest place you can find, which will depend upon your living and traveling arrangements.  Passports are the hottest commodities in the world, and yours is game for a clever pickpocket.

4.  <u>Listen to your gut</u>.   Never ignore your sixth sense.  When you get alarmed or spooked, there is probably a good reason for it.  Stop and calmly think for a few seconds: observe and assess the situation around you and decide what your options are for getting to a safer place.  Then make a decision and act.

5.  <u>Learn where your embassy or consulate offices are located</u>.   It's always a good idea to check in with your country's embassy when you're staying in a foreign country, particularly one with a less-developed communications system.  As soon as you

arrive, look at a map and orient yourself so you can find your country's consular offices.  Learn two or three different routes for getting there, as well as the best transportation methods, and stop by! Ask to speak to the Regional Security Officer and get a crime fact sheet for the area.  They are there to help.

6.  <u>Read local English-language newspapers, if possible</u>.  Local citizens and expatriates who write these papers can be some of the best sources of information about the local scene (although be aware that in some countries, the media are under government control—find out before you depart on your trip).

7.  <u>Avoid unexpectedly amorous men and women</u>.  Attractive as you may be, be wary of people who approach and try to woo you the moment you arrive.  Most of the time the real motive is gaining a foreign passport or your wallet, or taking you to a gift shop where you'll be pressured to buy.  As one saying goes, you're perceived as the cash cow, and everyone wants a little milk.  Listen to what your mother told you when you were 15—it still applies.

8.  <u>Become aware of real security threats</u>.  Before you ever set foot out of your home, you should do some research.  What is the political climate in the country you'll be visiting? Have there been recent demonstrations against the government? Might there be groups who have expressed strong anti-American sentiment due to political or economic developments? Most countries have some type of English-language media outlets on the Internet that publish local news; wire services such as AP and Reuters often cover such developments (check their archives); and political risk consulting companies often publish some of their assessments online for free.  Check them out. The point is not to engender fear or find reasons not to go on your adventure.  It is simply better to enter a foreign country with your eyes open.  For example, Americans traveling to Iran will probably experience magnificent hospitality from Iranians, but sudden turns in political events might increase tensions (also for Iranians, of course—not just tourists) and make travel less pleasant.  Be aware and be prepared.  In some places it might take keen eyes and ears to detect rumblings of civil unrest that can increase dangers to foreign visitors; in other cases the signs are clear and simply need to be heeded.  Not only will a heightened awareness of the political environment shorten your response time to potential warning signs, but gaining an education in local or national politics will demonstrate to those you meet that you have a greater depth of interest in your host country than sampling the local pastries.

9.  <u>Avoid known hotspots</u>.  This, of course, follows directly from #3: countries and regions that have experienced severe levels of conflict and violence are probably best left off your study-abroad itinerary for the immediate future.  Places that the US State Department advises against travel by US citizens and places that your institution doesn't consider safe or to have appropriate support services—these are places that should have dropped off your travel radar in recent years.  Use the advice of campus experts, other study abroad professions, and travel safety experts.  Consider the level

of risk you are assuming.  Others may have reported no problems during travel to the same location, but you want to avoid relying on luck to ensure your safety.

10. <u>Control the things you can control and don't panic</u>.   Choose a place to study and a program provider that can provide you with comprehensive support services abroad.  Before you go abroad, learn about the country and in particular the health and safety support mechanisms.  Bring an emergency card with a list of contact information for: the equivalent to "911" abroad, a US 24 Hour Contact, Insurance/Assistant Information and 24 Hour Contact, On-Site 24 Hour Contact, Local Medical Care Facility, Local Police Contact Information, US Embassy or Consulate Contact Information, etc.  Also, bring a list of help statements translated into the local language.

Don't take unnecessary risks: This includes limiting unsafe activities like bungee jumping, river rafting, and mountain climbing.  Don't get intoxicated by using alcohol or drugs that will limit your control over yourself and your interactions with others.  Try to have others travel or explore with you so that if something happens to you, they can assist to avoid or respond to an emergency.

Things happen in the world, some good and some bad.  While your travels overseas are likely to create some of the most valuable and positive experiences of your life, maintain a common-sense expectation that things may not always go as planned, and react as calmly as possible if they do not.  In a crisis situation, panicking only leads to more confusion and potentially poor decisions.  Think carefully and watch cautiously everything around you.