

Ten Healthy Travel Tips for Students

-- By [Frank Gillingham, MD](#)

For many students, travel is the best part of college or graduate school. Whether you're an American student heading for the London School of Economics, or a Chinese student bound for the University of Southern California, living in a different country can have a profound impact on your outlook and your plans. Here are ten tips to make your excursions safe.

1. Know how to find a doctor and a good hospital in your destination. Find out the names of hospitals that provide quality care. Learn the emergency numbers for your destination--dial 15 (112 from a cell phone) for an ambulance in Paris, 911 in New York, etc.-- and know that in some places you should not rely on these emergency numbers. Similarly, in some countries, you're better off taking a taxi to a hospital rather than waiting for an ambulance. HTH Worldwide offers students and travelers access to a community of pre-selected doctors outside the U.S., and to the Beech Street Provider Network within the U.S. HTH's [CityHealth Profiles](#) can help you learn what you need to know about hospitals and emergency numbers around the world.
2. Learn about the health and security risks in your destination and get the appropriate vaccinations you need. Can you drink the tap water? Is street crime a problem? Are there insect borne diseases to avoid (such as Malaria, or Lyme Disease, which exists in several areas of the United States)? HTH's [CityHealth Profiles](#) can help you learn about relevant health risks, as can the [Centers for Disease Control](#).
3. If you plan to drink, do so moderately. Your parents worry about airplane disasters, terrorism and exotic diseases. In fact, many of the injuries sustained by students studying or traveling abroad are related to drunkenness and the associated condition of temporary stupidity. As the advertisement says, know when to say "no." Stay with your friends and look out for each other.
4. Don't do drugs. In addition to the health risks of using drugs, as a foreigner you will be targeted by the most unscrupulous of all the suppliers. If the drugs you do or their contaminants make you sick, you will also find it much more difficult to get medical care abroad. Finally, if you get arrested with drugs, you may find it much harder to find a decent lawyer and you may face very severe penalties and/or deportation. Drug possession--including marijuana possession--is literally punishable by death in some countries. Rent the film "Midnight Express" if you need this advice dramatized.
5. If you plan to have sex, practice safe sex. Sexually transmitted viruses and bacteria do not respect national borders, regardless of what you might hear. Bring condoms and use them. Approach new partners with at least as much caution as you would at home.

A general point: sometimes students let the glamour and excitement of new friendships lure them into carelessness about drinking, drugs, unsafe sex, and other potentially dangerous behaviors. Making new friends is one valid goal for your trip--but plan ahead to stand by your convictions about what's safe and what isn't.

6. Buy travel health insurance. Health insurance pays the doctor and hospital when you get sick. You may think this is your parents' problem, but they may not know the limitations of their regular health plan, which probably doesn't provide adequate coverage overseas, especially if you're studying abroad for a semester or longer. Their regular plan is also unlikely to pay to evacuate you in the event of an emergency and ill prepared to give a foreign hospital a guarantee of payment (in some parts of the world, you won't be treated until you pay cash, in advance, or provide a payment guarantee). When you shop for insurance, look for a policy that includes an emergency assistance benefit (see below).

HTH Worldwide offers comprehensive insurance programs for students and travelers -- check them out!

7. Have an escape plan. What will you do in the event of a medical emergency, natural disaster or political upheaval? The answer: call an assistance company, like MEDEX or Worldwide Assistance. They're available to help with unplanned disasters, 24/7, in your native language, through their telephone call centers (toll free or collect, because toll free often doesn't work from other countries).

HTH's travel and student insurance programs have an emergency assistance benefit built in--be certain yours does too.

8. Drive safely. Car wrecks are one of the most common ways travelers sustain serious injury. Regardless of how long you've owned your own car, and how many times you've driven eight friends out for late-night munchies, the challenges of driving in a foreign country are significant. Road conditions vary -- alot. If you grew up driving in the UK, everything in the US will seem backwards. Think twice before you drive -- try to take a bus or train instead. Keep in mind that mopeds are always a bad idea.

9. Prepare for the psychological effects of living abroad. While most students find their study-abroad experience thrilling, all experience some degree of disorientation, confusion, and anxiety as they adjust to a new culture. In addition to the challenges of a foreign language and society, which can get more irritating over time, students often find themselves on a journey of self-discovery, questioning their personal goals, values, and purpose.

You can minimize culture shock by studying your host country's language, culture, and history, and by retaining a sense of humor and positive outlook. Keeping in touch with friends and family at home is important - and fairly easy and cheap with e-mail. Exercise can contribute to improved mood and better sleep. Like any significant life experience, study abroad can worsen or even precipitate mental illness. If you experience deep and persistent adjustment difficulties or strong emotions such as sadness, hopelessness, or worry, or you observe the same in a fellow student, seek the advice of your parents, and/or a mental health professional, primary care physician, or guidance counselor at your school.

10. Be realistic when setting goals for your trip. In their excitement to take full advantage of the opportunity, many students enumerate goals that are impossible to accomplish in the available time. These students are often disappointed and frustrated when they realize they're going to miss half of the twenty museums or cathedrals they'd hoped to visit. Avoid this let-down by being realistic about the time you have, by adjusting your goals as you learn the realities of life in your host country, and by being flexible. Take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. And start planning your next trip!

Remember, [Travel Insurance](#) from HTH can help protect your health and your vacation investment.

From the HTH Worldwide Website.

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