# Study Abroad Handbook: Safety Abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS: SAFETY ABROAD, STUDY ABROAD HANDBOOK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety Resources ................................................................. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Precautions by UWEC .................................................... 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in Your Host Country .................................................... 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart Traveler Enrollment Program ............................................. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Resources .............................................................. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Tips ................................................................................. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Safe Choices ................................................................. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT becoming a Target ............................................................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Valuables Safe ............................................................. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media and Internet Safety ................................................ 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Violence .......................................................................... 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How To Get Help .......................................................................... 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Contacts .................................................................... 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Assist: CISI 24-Hour Assistance Provider .......................... 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>911 Equivalent ........................................................................... 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest U.S. Embassy .................................................................. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Victim or Arrest Abroad .................................................... 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Protocol ..................................................................... 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting Health/Safety Concerns .............................................. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Report? .............................................................................. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to Report? .......................................................................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Report? ........................................................................... 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Liability Insurance ....................................................... 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SAFETY RESOURCES

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS BY UWEC

The CIE staff monitor a variety of health and safety email listservs/resources and maintain communication with international partners to stay informed on international issues and crises that might affect our students. In addition, CIE staff participate in regular webinars and trainings related to health and safety topics.

In particular, UWEC looks to official government sources, such as the U.S. Department of State travel advisories and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) travel warnings, when considering program safety. A Level 3 or 4 warning from the CDC, and a Level 3 or 4 advisory from the U.S. State Department would prompt review by the UWEC Travel Risk Committee, which includes the UW-Eau Claire risk manager, faculty/staff with study abroad expertise, and staff from the Student Health Services. If a decision to cancel a program is made, the CIE will contact students directly about the decision and next steps.

All students are enrolled in CISI Insurance (see Health and Insurance section for more information), which does include a Security Evacuation Benefit (at this time COVID-19 isn't considered a security evacuation triggering event). All students will also enroll in the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).

SAFETY IN YOUR HOST COUNTRY

Safety in and around your host city will be discussed during your orientation abroad. Information on crime, road safety, drug penalties, and terrorist activity in your host country is included in the US State Department Country Information page, Safety & Security section.

The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) has annual safety reports for most countries in the world.
SMART TRAVELER ENROLLMENT PROGRAM

Shortly before your program begins, you must enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) through the U.S. Department of State. The nearest U.S. Embassy in your host country can then contact you via email about safety conditions to help you make informed decisions about travel plans. It also helps the U.S. Embassy, family and friends contact you in an emergency.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **U.S. State Department**
  - In addition to country-specific information and STEP, the U.S. State Department also has information specifically for students on their "Student Abroad" site. You can stay connected to the U.S. State Department by signing up for their Facebook page and Twitter feed.

- **OSAC**
  - In addition to publishing country-specific reports, OSAC offers detailed subject guides:
    - How to prevent pickpocketing and petty crime
    - Step by step: What to do if your passport is lost or stolen

- **SAFETI Clearing House:**
  - The SAFETI (Safety Abroad First – Educational Travel Information) Clearinghouse Project creates and disseminates resources to support study abroad program development and implementation, emphasizing health and safety issues.

- **UWEC Campus Safety Information:** UWEC crime statistics and other information by the UWEC Campus Police.

SAFETY TIPS

MAKING SAFE CHOICES

July 2024, pg. 3
Much of safety abroad is made up of smaller events and decisions. The CIE and on-site staff monitor security risks in each country, but you are most responsible for your personal safety on a day-to-day basis. When everything around you is new and exciting, it is easy to forget safe behavior you would follow at home. Remember:

**Know local laws and abide by them:** U.S. citizenship (if you are a US citizen) offers no protection if you are arrested abroad. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. The “Local Laws & Special Circumstances” section of the U.S. State Department Country Information page for your host country is a good starting place.

**If you drink, do it responsibly:** If you choose to drink, do so in moderation, respecting yourself and others. Many countries have laws against public drunkenness. Alcohol is often a factor in crime here and abroad; a drunk person is an easy target for a criminal. In addition, drink-spiking occurs abroad just as at home: always watch your drink being made or poured and keep an eye on it.

**Do not use illegal drugs.** In some countries, drug use has harsh penalties, including long prison sentences or even a death sentence. Again, the “Local Laws & Special Circumstances” section of the U.S. State Department Country Information page for your host country contains brief information.

While drugs like marijuana may be relatively common in some countries, they are generally still illegal, and as a non-citizen you face higher risks, including deportation. In addition, if you are reported using illegal drugs during a program, both the host organization and UWEC disciplinary processes, including suspension from the program or expulsion from the university, may apply.

**Do not walk alone at night:** This advice applies to both men and women. Walking alone at night makes you an easier target for assault, theft, and in some places, transportation accidents. If you have been drinking, are in unfamiliar parts of a city, or an isolated area, the risk is even greater.

**Respect the knowledge of the staff at your host site.** Follow their advice: if they say to stay away from somewhere, do it!
When traveling, always leave an itinerary with a friend or family member at home and on-site: This helps locate you in the event of an emergency at home, or if you do not arrive at your next location on the expected day and time.

**NOT BECOMING A TARGET**

Tourists are often easy targets for crime. Thieves and other criminals may also be aware that a new group of study abroad students arrives in their city each term. To be safer:

1. Do not wear clothing with U.S. logos (team or university logos, U.S. flags, etc.).
2. Stay away from "typical" U.S. hangouts abroad (McDonald's, Hard Rock Cafes).
3. If you need to visit a U.S. Embassy, fine--but do not hang around just to see it.
4. Find out which bars or restaurants are known to be international student gathering places. Be extra careful if you drink in such locales. Always come and go with a group.
5. Do not yell across the room or street at your friend in loud, U.S. “American” tones.
6. Do not stop in the street to be "interviewed" or "surveyed" by anyone. This is often a cover for theft.

**KEEPING VALUABLES SAFE**

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<tr>
<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>DO NOT</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Leave valuables in a secure place at home whenever possible.</td>
<td>X Carry more cash on your person than you need for the day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Wear a money belt or neck pouch under clothing when you must carry your passport, credit/debit cards, etc.</td>
<td>X Have expensive phones or other electronic equipment out in public.</td>
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**SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET SAFETY**

July 2024, pg. 5
We understand that you will want to share your experiences abroad with your friends and family members back home using your Instagram, TikTok, or other social media accounts. However, the rules of internet safety still apply while abroad. If you would like to share location-specific information while abroad, set your account to private and vet all followers and interactions you receive, blocking anyone you do not recognize.

**If you choose to keep your accounts public, only post photos and/or specific locations after you have already left.** This includes both any personal travel/trips you may take and daily activities in your host city. Unless you are in a particularly large city (e.g., Seoul) you may also want to wait to share your host city or university until you return to the U.S.

If you are attending a short-term Winterim or Summer program, you may want to wait to share anything on social media at all until after you return. In addition to safety, this will also help you to focus on and fully enjoy your short time abroad!

Read this [short article from the Yale Cybersecurity office](#) for more ways to keep yourself safe when using social media abroad.

For information on general internet safety abroad, [read this short article from the Federal Communications Commission](#).

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Sexual violence can happen to people of all gender identities anywhere in the world. It is 100% the perpetrator’s fault. The most important thing you can do for yourself or a friend who is sexually assaulted is to get support and medical care.

If you or someone you know is facing or has been a victim of sexual assault overseas, please contact the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at 1-888-407-4747 (from overseas: 202-501-4444) or the closest U.S. embassy or consulate.

The following resources are not an exhaustive list of resources available to students. There may be additional resources available in your host country.
• **U.S. Government Resources:**
  - [U.S. Citizen Victims of Crime](#): The U.S. State Department has a list of resources for U.S. citizens who are victims of crime abroad.

• **International Resources:**
  - [Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)](#): A free, live, secure, anonymous hotline for victims of sexual violence, their friends, and families. They are available 24/7 by phone: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or they have a live chat feature on their website.
  - [Pathways to Safety International](#): An organization that empowers victims of interpersonal and gender-based violence abroad. They provide resources about sexual assault abroad and can be reached by emailing crisis@pathwaystosafety.org.

• **UWEC Resources:**
  - [Center for Awareness of Sexual Assault (CASA)](#):
    - A 24/7, free, confidential, crisis line can be reached at 1-715-836-HELP (4357) (there may be international fees for calling this number). It is geared towards support, information sharing and options.
    - Advocacy and counseling support services available by emailing casa@uwec.edu
  - [Dean of Students Safety Resources](#)

• **Additional Resources:**
  - [Meaningful Travel Tips and Tales: Sexual Violence and Harassment](#): Go Abroad.com has a detailed guide discussing sexual violence resources, understanding different cultural codes/cues, street harassment, navigating the international bar scene, foreign relationships, etc.
Even if you take all the right precautions—things happen! And although you will be a long way from home, you are not alone. Here are several ways to get help.

**EMERGENCY CONTACTS**

All UWEC programs have an on-site contact person. An emergency contact card will be uploaded to your BlugoldsAbroad account prior to departure. Print it and keep a copy in your wallet in case you do not have internet access when you need it! USAC students will have two cards, one with UWEC information and one with USAC information.

**TEAM ASSIST: CISI 24-HOUR ASSISTANCE PROVIDER**

If you are on personal travel outside of the program framework, you may not be able to contact the on-site contact person for help. You have 24-hour assistance through your CISI insurance. Team Assist can help with replacing important items (think passport or credit card), or locating legal services, such as a local attorney or appropriate consular officer. Find all details at the [CISI portal](#) or access the information via the Health and Insurance section of the [Study Abroad Handbook](#). Print out the brochure and emergency assistance benefit card to carry with you whenever you travel.

**911 EQUIVALENT**

The U.S. State Department provides a list of [911 numbers abroad](#). In some countries there are different numbers for fire, police, and ambulance. The numbers are listed in your UWEC program guide or in your USAC Arrival Guide for USAC programs.

**NEAREST U.S. EMBASSY**

U.S. Embassies and/or Consulates also offer some assistance to U.S. citizens abroad. You can find a complete list of U.S. Embassies abroad on the CISI portal or at [www.usembassy.gov](http://www.usembassy.gov). They will assist in the following:

- Provide a list of local physicians and lawyers.
- Contact next of kin in event of emergency.
• Aid during civil unrest or natural disaster.
• Contact relations on your behalf to request funds or guidance in an emergency.

CRIME VICTIM OR ARREST ABROAD

If you are the victim of a crime or are arrested abroad, notify the program coordinator at your host site and your UWEC Study Abroad Manager and/or get in touch with the nearest U.S. consulate or embassy.

EMERGENCY PROTOCOL

In an emergency, the CIE is in close contact with our partners abroad. Depending on the situation, our partners will seek advice from local authorities and the U.S. Consulate or Embassy closest to the program. In emergency situations, follow these steps. The contact information you need is on your Emergency Contact Card(s).

1) Inform the local program staff.
   a. This is crucial, especially if there is a time difference with Eau Claire. Local staff can respond in real time and are knowledgeable about local resources.
   b. If there has been a large-scale attack or disaster, please check-in with your local staff ASAP.
   c. In programs where you live with host families, your host family may be your first point of contact.

1a) If the on-site liaison is not available, contact your host site’s emergency number.

2) Contact the UWEC Center for International Education. Often, we will have already been contacted by your on-site liaison, and we will be in touch with
students abroad through their liaisons, and directly via e-mail, with any pertinent information.

2a) If you are unable to reach your on-site liaison or the Center for International Education, call the UWEC Campus Police After Hours Numbers listed on your Emergency Contact Card. After-hours contacts can be made to this number 24 hours a day. You may get an answering machine, but an officer is alerted as soon as you have left a message. Be sure to leave a phone number you can be reached at and what type of assistance you require. The officer will contact a study abroad staff member who will respond to you.

3) Contact your family and friends at home. Parents and other important people want to know that you are safe. E-mail is often the most reliable contact method.

REPORTING HEALTH/SAFETY CONCERNS

WHY REPORT?

If you or a friend experiences a health or safety incident abroad, we encourage you to report the incident to the CIE. We can then provide support or resources to help manage the concern.

In some instances, UWEC has a legal obligation under the Clery Act to report incidents that occur on study abroad programs. Your report helps determine if an incident needs to be reported to the federal government. No personally identifying information will be shared.

Finally, incident reports assist UWEC in evaluating the safety of existing study abroad locations.

WHAT TO REPORT?

Our partners abroad often report serious concerns involving UWEC students, but we would also like to hear from you about any of the following:
**STUDY ABROAD HANDBOOK: SAFETY ABROAD**

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<tr>
<th>Aggravated Assault</th>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>Sexual Assault</th>
<th>Disease Outbreaks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrests</td>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
<td>Fires</td>
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<td>Death</td>
<td>Missing Person</td>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>Floods</td>
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**HOW TO REPORT?**

There are two ways to report an incident:

1. **Incident Report Form.** You can report an incident anonymously or provide your name and contact details.

2. **Contact your UWEC Study Abroad Manager** and providing the following information:
   a. Date of the incident
   b. Time (in-country time) of incident
   c. Country/city of incident (note these may be different than your program site if you are traveling)
   d. Nature of the incident (e.g., illness, injury, assault, theft, etc.)
   e. Individuals involved.

The manager may then ask follow-up questions to help provide the appropriate support and complete the reporting process.

*Please note that by law, UWEC study abroad managers must report incidents of sexual misconduct, including victims’ and alleged perpetrators’ names, if known, to the campus Title IX and/or Clery coordinators. Information gathered may also result in an investigation by the UWEC Dean of Students Office or the Affirmative Action Office.*

**PERSONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE**

July 2024, pg. 11
All UWEC study abroad students have limited personal liability insurance, in addition to their CISI medical coverage. Details on this personal liability insurance can be found in the Health + Insurance section of the Study Abroad Handbook.