

University of Wisconsin-Madison

International Safety and Security Director's

Best Practices for Safe International Travel in Today's World

- ***Avoid the typical large-scale tourist sites or events during peak visiting hours.*** Those with significant cultural value or that represent government credibility are at greater risk—e.g., a large government-affiliated museum or cultural center. Plan visits specifically to avoid peak hours at a particular site even if somewhat inconvenient – try to visit public locations during the morning hours; arriving after any “opening rush” is best. Additionally, if a site or event is associated with a particular holiday season or cultural celebration, avoid visiting or participating on days and/or times when the largest crowds will be present. Consider whether a public event such as a major concert, music festival or athletic match might be perceived as representative of the government's credibility or Western culture and thus become a likely target for adverse groups.

- ***Be cognizant of the anniversary dates of highly publicized previous attacks or other significant military or governmental actions or historical events.*** Terrorist groups tend to seek the perceived poignancy of actions that coincide with anniversaries of other similar attacks or military/governmental actions. Avoid large-scale public events and visits to iconic cultural sites on or near the calendar-dates of such anniversaries.

- ***Be aware of current political and social issues that might create public tension or be the source of local or regional grievances.*** Educate yourself about political actions and/or social movements that target or disenfranchise certain ethnic/religious/political groups. Avoid areas, events or public icons where contact between such groups is apt to occur and create tension.

- ***Avoid government agencies or facilities.*** If you need to visit any of these on official business, e.g., to renew or extend a visa, accept some inconvenience to do so at times when you are most likely to avoid a waiting crowd, or ideally, wait until mid-morning or early afternoon, when employees will not be arriving for the working day and there will not be a line at security checkpoints or secured entrances.

- ***Avoid visiting large commercial headquarters or visibly “branded” offices.*** If you must visit a large corporate office, try to accomplish your business during hours when there are not a lot of people at the entrance foyers or in security lines. Usually, this would mean visiting during mid-morning or early afternoon hours after the “lunch crowd” has already returned to work. Try to learn which Western or publically “branded” offices might be targeted by regional groups for social-political reasons (e.g., commercial interests that allegedly exploit a population segment)

- ***Avoid “the very best” or most popular “touristy” dining places or clubs or higher end shopping/club districts that are frequented by wealthier tourists and corporate-business types;***

again—especially during peak hours. Again, morning and early afternoon hours are best. This is even more important if the area or district itself (e.g., a shopping area or mall) attracts a relatively large number of patrons at a particular time. Talk to locals who are familiar and find out when a particular location or district is most likely to attract less of a crowd.

- ***Avoid crowded transportation terminals or hubs, especially if those are exposed to the general public***, such as a bus or train station that lacks secure checkpoints for entry. If you have a need to use such a terminal, then wait for a specific boarding time nearby, while avoiding the crowded platform or pier during the preceding period. If you are at an airport or train station and are waiting for your departure, move away from congested areas and find a place that is not likely to become a target—such as sitting at a nearby gate that is currently not in use.

- ***Avoid standing in long lines or ques of any sort***, even if this means purchasing tickets to an event or activity at a slightly higher price via a vendor or other resource or arriving later and leaving earlier than otherwise might be desired.

- ***Avoid public crowds of any type***. If you are at a particular location and for some reason the area becomes congested with many other pedestrians, e.g., a large crowd of people forms that is not moving very quickly, depart the area as rapidly as possible even if that means abandoning or significantly changing your plans or itinerary. Large-scale athletic or concert events should be avoided. These venues are a lot of fun for travelers abroad, but they represent lucrative targets to violent groups. If you attend a large event of this type, *take careful mental note of how you would exit rapidly or where you might take cover if needed ...* this only takes a few seconds of your thoughts and could save your life.

- ***Maintain contact with others*** in your travel group and your host program while abroad.

- ***Avoid going out alone***. If you must do so, be sure that someone else knows your destination, how you will get there and your expected time of return. This is important—no one can help you if they don't know where you were going, how you tried to get there and when you departed!

- ***Keep the U.S. embassy or consulate's contact and location information with you at all times*** and have a general idea about how you might communicate with the embassy if needed.

- ***Enroll in the U.S. Department of State's "STEP"*** to receive timely information and guidance in the case of events that demand immediate attention: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

- If, in the highly unlikely circumstance that you are nearby when there is a bombing or attack of any scale—***DO NOT, under any circumstances, move toward the site, even if intending to help the victims or observe what has happened from a respectful distance***. Terror groups often will target the movement of crowds both away and toward an initial attack site to sequence a second attack. If you hear an event take place nearby that you believe is a possible terrorist-styled attack, depart

the area as quickly as possible, ideally avoiding any crowd that may be doing the same and moving without aid of any large scale transportation—e.g., do not use buses or trains, simply walk directly away for some distance before taking advantage of even trustworthy transportation. If you are very close to what appears to be an attack or even are at the site of an attack itself, immediately take cover or find refuge until the threat has passed and the area is secured by first-responders--sometimes attempting to move away from a site will increase risk. It is a matter of trying to remain aware of the circumstances around you and making a quick decision as to whether it is better to shelter in place or move away quickly.

If an attack takes place between you and your destination, even if it is your lodging, go well out of your way to circumvent the site or move out of the area entirely with the belongings you may have with you and stay someplace else for a night at a hotel or with friends. The small amount of money spent for this precaution is worth the expense! You can help authorities/first-responders by remaining clear of the area.

- If there is a violent action or natural event that threatens your host country or an area in which you are traveling, check-in with your programming office or someone at UW-Madison via any means possible (cell phone call or text, an e-mail) as soon as you can. Let this contact know your status, whether your travel plans are impacted, and whether you would like anyone else in the U.S. to be contacted on your behalf, perhaps to relay a message. Be sure that your contact at UW-Madison knows to pass this information to your study abroad office or to the ISSD as soon as possible.

The entire premise of the above suggestions is to decrease exposure and thereby mitigate personal risk. Quite simply, world dynamics have changed and the circumstances demand that UW-Madison travelers remain conscious of their surroundings and aware of what is taking place around them—this increased **“situational awareness”** will go a long way to keeping travelers safe and secure while abroad. Travelers should apply this same mindset to any activity or event—this should not change or dilute your experience abroad, but only give you some pause to think through your specific actions and plans in order to better manage risk while overseas.



Remember: *following any major security event or violent episode, a host country will very likely strengthen their procedures, guidelines and directives for maintaining the public’s well-being. This undoubtedly will create longer lines and waiting times with accompanying frustration. Please be understanding and remain courteous – remember that these actions are taken on the public’s behalf to preempt further violence!*