



International Division  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## UW-Madison Security Tips for International Travelers (Updated Spring 2023)

### Identify and Minimize Risks

- Avoid popular tourist sites or large events during peak visiting hours. Locations or events that represent the government or have significant cultural value are at greater risk. Consider whether a public event such as a major concert, music festival, or athletic match might be perceived as representative of the government or foreign interests, making it subject to attack. Plan visits specifically to avoid peak hours even if it is inconvenient. Try to visit public locations during the morning while arriving after any “opening rush.” If a site or event is associated with a particular holiday season or cultural celebration, avoid visiting or participating on days when crowds are largest.
- Avoid government facilities as these can be targets for terrorist attacks. If you need to visit any of these on official business – like to renew or extend a visa – do so when crowds or waiting times are minimal. Ideally, wait until mid-morning or early afternoon, after employees have arrived and there aren’t significant lines 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 fewer people at the entrance or in security lines. Usually, this means visiting during the mid-morning or early afternoon after the “lunch crowd” has already returned to work. Try to learn which foreign or publicly branded offices might be targeted by regional groups for social-political reasons (e.g., commercial interests that allegedly exploit a population segment).
- Avoid popular or tourist restaurants, clubs, and higher-end shopping districts during peak hours. Criminals and terrorists may target these locations because of the presence of large numbers of foreigners and/or for their perceived affluence. Morning and early afternoon are typically the best times to visit these locations, particularly if the location draws large crowds. Talk to locals who are familiar with the area and find out at what times crowds are the smallest.
- Avoid crowded transportation terminals or hubs, especially if those are exposed to the public, such as a bus or train station that lacks secure checkpoints for entry. If you need to use such a terminal, 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 queues of any sort. This may mean 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 large public crowds of any type. If you are at a particular location and the area becomes congested with pedestrians, depart as rapidly as possible even if that means abandoning or changing your plans or itinerary. Large-scale athletic events or concerts should be avoided. These venues are a lot of fun for travelers abroad, but they represent tempting targets for violent groups, and in some areas overcrowded venues can lead to deadly “[crowd crush](#)” incidents. 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. Creating a [hasty plan](#) only takes a few seconds and it could save your life.

- Avoid going out alone. If you must go out alone, make sure someone trusted knows your destination, how you will get there, and when you'll be back. 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.
- Be on the lookout for warning signs of potential unrest or violence such as out-of-place bags, vehicles, or containers, suspicious people, or hostile action. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Leave immediately and report suspicious activity to the appropriate local authorities.

### **Consider the History of Your Destination**

- Be aware of the anniversary dates of highly publicized previous attacks, other significant military or governmental actions, or historical events. Terrorist groups may seek to commit attacks on these dates for increased poignancy. Avoid large-scale public events and visits to iconic cultural sites on or near important dates.

### **Understand Current Events**

- 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, social movements, disenfranchised populations.
- Monitor local media and government sources, international news, and the nearby U.S. embassy or consulate for information.
- Avoid areas, events, or public icons where contact between such groups is apt to occur and create tension.
- Enroll in the U.S. Department of State's [Safe Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive timely updates about important issues from the local embassy or consulate.

### **Have a Plan**

- No matter where you are, identify exits and areas to take shelter if necessary.
- If targeted violence occurs, practice "[Run. Hide. Fight.](#)" Act decisively.
- Learn lifesaving skills. Take training such as FEMA's "[You Are the Help Until Help Arrives](#)" and first aid classes so you can assist yourself and others.
- If an attack occurs and you are outside the threat area, DO NOT move toward it. Perpetrators may still be present and attackers target responders with secondary attacks. Depart the area as quickly as possible. Responders may be trying to access the incident and there may be large fleeing crowds. Avoid using buses or trains as these may be crowded and could be targeted. Move quickly on foot outside of the affected area before taking advantage of trustworthy transportation.
- If an attack takes place between you and your destination or lodging, go out of your way to circumvent the site, or take the belongings you have and move out of the area entirely staying at a



different hotel or with friends. The small amount of money spent on this precaution is worth the expense. You can help authorities and first responders by remaining clear of the area.

- Learn about common severe weather and natural disasters for your destination. Monitor local news and government sources for updates about weather. Have a plan for natural disasters and visit [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) to learn how you can prepare and protect yourself for a range of potential incidents.

### **Communicate with Others**

- Maintain constant contact with others in your travel group and your host program while abroad.
- If you see suspicious activity, report it to your host organization and local authorities.
- Always keep the U.S. embassy or consulate's contact and location information with you. Have a general idea about how you might communicate with the embassy if needed.
- If there is a violent action or natural disaster 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 (call, text, messaging app, 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 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 to better manage risk while overseas.

Remember: following any major security event or violent episode, a host country will very likely strengthen its 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 – these actions are taken on the public's behalf.