



How To Prepare & Deal With An Emergency Abroad

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Your bags are packed, tickets are in hand. Your itinerary has been checked twice, excitement is brewing, and you're ready to dive into the trip of a lifetime. Your international internship — or other meaningful travel program — is going to open doors and teach you everything you need to know. The last thing on your mind is an overseas emergency.

However, unfortunately, this is something most travelers should think about. Emergencies while traveling abroad can come in all shapes and sizes, from a natural disaster to political upheaval, from an accident or illness to becoming the victim of crime. Overt worrying can kill any trip buzz, but taking simple precautions and outlining potential emergencies before travel can ease your mind. An hour or two of work may save your trip if the "worst case scenario" should occur.

Is the world unsafe for travel?

To the untrained eye, it may seem that danger is lurking around every corner of our globe these days — from London, to Manchester, to Paris. The mainstream media and internet-in-our-pockets have made access to information and at times, unfortunately, news about world events and crises more accessible than ever. While there are many reports suggesting we are actually living in one of the most peaceful periods in recorded human history, there's still justifiable reasoning behind wanting to put your passport under lock and key (at least for now).

But alas — more than ever, we need to travel

It is through lessening the gap between "us" and "them" that we can begin working towards true peace amongst peoples. It is through seeing the "other" as more or less the same as us — a human with basic human needs and desires. We all love fresh water. We all want our family and friends, and ourselves, to be healthy and our optimal version. We all want to laugh and be surrounded by love.

And while certain things may manifest as totally and wildly different (sorry, I'm probably never gonna want to eat goat for Christmas supper), you can delight in the differences while relishing in our overwhelming similarities.

Now, more than ever, we need to commit to seeking understanding, building relationships with those outside of our normal circles, to push our comfort zones, to see the world for its beauty, not just for its dark underbelly. We need to fight violence with compassion, love, and understanding, and not let the fear mongering invite a dusty passport.

Besides, traveling makes you less of a jerkface.

Emergencies do happen — both abroad and at home. Here's how you can prepare.

The Worst Case Scenario

The recent unsettled political atmosphere in Egypt has forced U.S. college students there to leave or prepare to leave the country following the demonstrations and political upheaval on the streets of Cairo and beyond. Some universities even went as far as to suspend certain programs with the American University in Cairo. In 2011 when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was ousted, enrollments by U.S. students for international programs in Egypt dropped over 40 percent.

This worse case scenario is thankfully few and far between, but being a world traveler is dependent on the state of the world. While it is important to not be governed by fear, it is good to stay up on political situations or unrest that may be effecting your potential internship location.

So, let's outline how to prepare a plan to avoid civil unrest situations or more common travel troubles, like losing a passport or getting severely lost or sick. Whether interning abroad or just traveling as a tourist, you don't want to get stuck in a scary situation, so here are some helpful tips:

1. Outline a plan:

Spend some time checking travel requirements needed for your trip. Unfortunately, few people are more vulnerable than unstudied travelers and people new to the country. The best thing you can do is prepare.

Be sure to get other individuals into the mix — your program provider or resident director is a great first place to start. In fact, you should double check with your program provider that they have emergency protocols in place, and that there are clear steps outlined for when emergencies happen on the ground. Of course, your parents and loved ones will want to be kept informed too, but it's often best to default to your program provider's suggested steps (which will probably include some time to message mom and dad).

Let your country of origin know you're there:

Registering at the U.S. Embassy (or your local embassy) ensures they know your whereabouts and how to contact you or your relatives. It also provides travelers with updates regarding

travel warnings, travel alerts, and other information. Register online before you leave or as soon as you arrive.

It may seem weird to put your travel plans in the hands of your government, but when it comes time to account for citizens in disaster zones, it will make contacting your family go a whole lot smoother

Know your general information:

While at home, general personal information can be recited at the drop of a hat without hardly a thought. But, after landing in a foreign nation, the normal becomes anything but. Be sure to memorize your address, phone number, and the contact information of someone you can reach out to in a time of need such as a host parent, colleague, roommate, or advisor.

Utilize the State Department Resources:

What happens when you're traveling abroad and things go awry? The U.S. Department of State and the Bureau of Consular Affairs have put together a go-to list of what student travelers can and cannot do in a crisis and what they can expect from their government back home. This is an excellent, thorough resource to review and find answers to questions such as:

What is the Department of State's role during a crisis overseas?

Do you always evacuate U.S. citizens during a crisis overseas?

Will the U.S. government pick me up in an emergency?

What happens during an evacuation?

How can I receive updated information during a crisis?

What if I do not have access to email or phone service?

Common-Sense Safety Tips BEFORE You Travel

Other handy tips to have in your back pocket in case of an unexpected situation while interning, or studying, abroad are:

1. Be informed.

Know the addresses, phone numbers, and directions to-and-from your residence, workplace, and in-country resources. Keep family and friends aware of where you will be going, and even send over a schedule or itinerary to keep them informed of travel plans in case of emergency. Keep all important documents or information in a safe and secure location while abroad. Stay up-to-date on the local news and if any type of protest, demonstration, or national emergency is occurring.

2. Stay out of trouble.

If something like protests, demonstrations, or a national crisis of some sort are happening, do not get involved. It may seem tempting, but not engaging will help ensure your safety.

3. If something bad happens, call your local embassy.

The embassy will help you locate medical assistance or legal representation. Many international internship programs work hard to ensure their participants safety. Be aware of the resources available to you such as a security administrator.

4. Keep your online and financial identity secure.

Banks and cell phone companies need to be kept in the loop. Let them know that you will be leaving the country, where you're going and for how long. This will help to avoid a "blackout." Only take needed ID and payment methods. In other words, take precautions to avoid identity theft. A good rule of thumb is to bring one debit card and one credit card and leave everything else at home. Keep your ID/documents, phones, and credit cards with you and in multiple front pockets, ideally with zippers or buttons. That fanny pack may not be fashionable, but it could be the key to peace of mind!

5. Be alert when traveling outside of the tourist comfort zone.

This cannot be stressed enough: stay aware of your surroundings and trust your instincts if something feels shady or uncomfortable. Many tourists and students encounter friendly "luggage carriers," fake police officers, and the globally infamous pickpockets.