



# Safety and Health Whilst Travelling on University Business

## General Guidance

The University has a duty of care to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of their staff whilst they are travelling on business whether this be within the UK or overseas. There is also a duty placed upon the individual employee who is travelling to take reasonable care for his/her own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions or omissions.

This is important when travelling or working away from the University, and especially when overseas, as the University has much less meaningful control over safety or health hazards that may face staff whilst away from University controlled sites. It is therefore important that staff make themselves aware of information regarding the areas that they intend to travel or work in, if overseas this would include the laws of that country and any related safety, or health, issues.

If you are about to travel abroad in the course of your work or studies, particularly if your destination country is in some way "politically unstable", or offers some other indication that you might be exposing yourself to a higher degree of risk than you would normally experience, by visiting the location in question, you should consult the official advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Travel Advice Unit. In the event that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) advice to UK nationals is "strongly advise against all travel" you must heed this advice. The University of Edinburgh does not permit you to travel to the specified country, or area of the specified country. If the FCO advice is "strongly advise against all but essential travel", or to "exercise extreme caution", you are strongly advised to heed this advice and in these cases the FCO risk status must be conveyed to your Head of School/Support Unit and permission sought to proceed with travel, such permission should only be granted after an exhaustive risk management assessment has been prepared in conjunction with the travelling staff member. You should however be aware that FCO advice is general to all travellers, both tourists and business travellers, and may be affected by political motivation.

If you intend travelling, or working, in a country with an elevated FCO risk status it is strongly recommended that you register with the British Embassy or Consular Office on your arrival and that you keep these contact details in your possession in order that action can be taken should the situation change or the FCO risk status upgraded.

The University Occupational Health Unit is also available for pre-travel assessments. Please contact them direct on 50 8190 or email [occupational.health@ed.ac.uk](mailto:occupational.health@ed.ac.uk).

The following guidance is general in nature and whilst much of it applies to overseas travel much will also be relevant to travel or work within the UK.

## Documentation

- Your passport and any visa documentation are extremely important documents, you should make sure that they are kept in a safe place during travel and whilst in a foreign country. If available always use hotel safes for safekeeping of such important documents. Some countries require that foreign nationals carry their passports at all times if this is the case thought should be given to secure storage of such items on your person e.g. body belt rather than in handbags or pockets which may be easily snatched or picked.
- You should leave a photocopy of these documents with your home School or Support Unit Office and it may be a prudent to carry a copy on your person, this should be separate from your original passport. If you are unhappy carrying this with you, an alternative is to scan it and email it to the system that you have access to whilst overseas e.g. hotmail.

## Contact Information

- You should leave an itinerary of your travel arrangements, including hotel/host contact information with your School/Support Unit office.
- If you are attending meetings you should leave contact information of the persons/places you are to meet. The persons you are meeting should have details of a School/Support Unit contact to alert in the event that you do not turn up.
- In the event that your itinerary alters you should alert your School/Support Unit of the alterations and supply updated contact numbers
- You should always have emergency contact numbers with you, both for your home country and your host country. It is a good idea to have these programmed into your mobile telephone as well as being kept in paper form with your other important documents.
- Check with your provider that your mobile telephone will work in the countries through which you are travelling and that you have International Roaming availability.

## High Risk Countries or Areas

Travel and work in high risk countries should only be undertaken if there is no other viable option and then only after a thorough risk assessment has been undertaken and all risk reducing steps put in place. See important advice re Foreign and Commonwealth Office above.

- If you are being met at an airport or railway station find out before your arrival the name of the person that will be meeting you and where

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possible have a photograph of them emailed to you before you leave this country.

- If the above is not possible ask the person picking you up where they are taking you, instead of telling them where you want to go. This is good way in which to check that you have the correct pick up.
- If travelling to a very high-risk area, consider arranging a password to confirm who is picking you up.
- Always be aware of those around you and be on the look out for suspicious behaviour.
- It is advisable to be careful of any individual who is asking you a lot of questions, particularly if they are of a personal nature, and be careful of how much information you disclose.
- If you find yourself in a situation where you are uncomfortable in terms of personal safety, take immediate steps to remove yourself from the situation.

## Transport

- Where possible book all tickets in advance from this country
- Always use licensed taxi cabs and wherever possible book these to pick you up from a location rather than hail them in the street.
- Do not be afraid to challenge the driver and ask to see his cab drivers licence.

## Accommodation

- Always book into a good standard of accommodation and check that it has basic security and fire precaution systems in place e.g. 24 hr reception, smoke detectors, signed exits, etc.
- If possible book a room on the 2nd to 7th floor as those on the ground and 1st floors are the easiest to break into, whilst in some countries fire escapes do not extend above the 7th floor.
- Always check your nearest escape route when you first check into a new hotel. It is recommended that you count the number of doors, or steps required, between your room and the fire escape in case you are disorientated when the alarm goes off, should the lighting fail or the corridor be smoke logged.
- Always remember to take your room key with you if you leave in an emergency situation. Should your means of escape be blocked, for instance by fire or smoke you may have to return to your room to alert reception that you cannot escape and remain there until help arrives.
- Should you be trapped in your room, do not panic, lay some fabric material such as bed linen clothes, etc across the bottom of the door to prevent ingress of smoke, open and standby the window where you can shout for help or wave light coloured material to attract attention.
- It is advisable to have a small grab bag by your bed in case for any reason you must evacuate your room quickly. This should contain important documentation such as your passport, visa, etc.
- In some countries power cuts are not uncommon; in such countries it is advisable to have a small torch with you.

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- If you feel insecure in the room allocated to you do not be afraid to insist on a change.
- Always put your door on the latch at night.

### **Prescription and over the counter medicines**

- Do not assume that because medicines can be legally prescribed, or bought over the counter in pharmacies in this country that they can be legally taken into another country. Find out the laws of the countries you intend travelling to, in particular what substances it is illegal to bring into the country. For information on this go to the World Health Organisation ([www.who.org](http://www.who.org))
- Medicines should be kept in your hand baggage when travelling and in the hotel room safe (if available) after arrival.
- If you need to take syringes into a foreign country it is advisable to take a letter from your doctor.
- Ensure all required vaccinations are up to date well in advance of travelling as it can take up to 10 days for some vaccinations to become effective. Advice on the requirement of vaccinations can be obtained from the Health and Safety Department's Occupational Health Unit at: <mailto:occupational.health@ed.ac.uk>, or 508190. The health professionals in the Unit can also administer most travel vaccines as well as undertaking a pre-travel assessment.
- If you require vaccination against Yellow Fever the Unit will refer you on for this as this can only be administered at a registered centre. If you have been vaccinated against Yellow Fever it is essential that you remember to carry your Yellow Fever certificate with you.

### **Ill health insurance whilst travelling**

- Be aware, and take note with you, of the 24-hour number that is available via the University insurance for hospital care or medical attention. Insurance for all University travel should be arranged via the University's Insurance Office, please note cover is NOT automatic and should be arranged on an individual or group basis through the University's Insurance Office at: [insurance@ed.ac.uk](mailto:insurance@ed.ac.uk), or 50 9154.
- University travel insurance is provided by ACE Insurance. A copy of the University's Travel Insurance policy can be viewed at: <http://www.finance.ed.ac.uk/finweb/insurance/Travelinsurance.cfm>

### **Risk Assessment**

An essential part of preparation for foreign travel, or a field trip, is carrying out a risk assessment. This must be undertaken well in advance of your travel and it must be countersigned by your Head of School or Support Unit. The Overseas Travel Risk Assessment is available in our Risk Assessment section. If you are undertaking field work, a Health and Safety Field Work Risk Assessment (FA1) should also be completed.

- [Overseas Travel Risk Assessment](#)
- [Field Work Risk Assessment \(FA1\)](#)

## **Some websites that have good information on overseas travel are:**

### **Health**

- BBC [http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/healthy\\_living/travel\\_health/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/healthy_living/travel_health/)
- Travel Health <http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/advice/>
- WHO <http://www.who.int/ith/en/>
- CDCP <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>

### **Safety**

- FCO <http://www.fco.gov.uk>

## **Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice When**

### **you are there:**

Be aware of security and take sensible precautions. Leave your jewellery and valuables at home if you can. Only carry as much money as you need for the day. Leave the rest, and at least one credit card, in the hotel safe if one is available. Keep copies of your passport, insurance details and other important travel documents separate from the originals. It is useful to always have some form of identity on you, such as a driving licence or a photocopy of your passport. Stay aware of what is going on around you and keep away from situations where you do not feel comfortable.

Find out from your guidebook or tour guide about any local scams. Keep up to date with local and regional events in the media. Don't take risks that you wouldn't take at home. If a situation looks dangerous, it probably is. Keep a note of the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate phone number (details are on our Travel Advice pages for the country you are visiting). When you arrive, find out how to get in touch with the local emergency services in case you need them during your stay.

Passports are valuable documents, and you are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to protect your passport. While we can usually issue replacement passports overseas (see Passports & Visas), if you repeatedly lose your passport while overseas we may need to interview you for security purposes before issuing a replacement. In certain circumstances, we may need to restrict the validity of replacement passports. We will explain this to you in full. Stay in regular touch with your family and friends in the UK, especially if you are travelling alone or in a remote area or you are aware of a terrorist attack or other catastrophe in the region in which you are travelling. Although you may feel perfectly safe, people at home may worry if they don't hear from you, and could report you missing.

You must keep to local laws. There may be very serious penalties for breaking a law which might seem trivial to you or for doing something which may not be illegal in the UK. Do not overstay your visa or work illegally – you may be fined or sent to prison. Hobbies that involve using cameras and binoculars, such as

bird watching or plane spotting, may be misunderstood (particularly near military and/or government installations and sites). If in doubt, don't do it.

Respect local customs and behave and dress appropriately, particularly when visiting religious sites, markets and rural communities. Travel guidebooks, tour operators and hotel staff are all useful sources of information. If in doubt, take extra care. In some places, behaviour that would be acceptable elsewhere can lead to serious trouble. In some countries, it can also be worth asking for permission before taking any photographs so as not to cause offence. Help protect local wildlife and habitats by respecting rules and regulations (including how to get rid of rubbish properly).

Be aware that buying any wildlife products is risky. Customs departments throughout the world confiscate illegal souvenirs, and in the UK you could face a criminal prosecution and fines. Check that what you are bringing back to the UK is legal. You can get more information on bringing back meat, animal products or plants from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk) or phone 08459 335577. You can get information about banned and restricted goods, and your customs allowances, from HM Revenue and Customs on [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk) or phone 0845 010 9000.

Be aware of local attitudes to alcohol and know your own limit. Remember that drinks served overseas are often stronger than those served in the UK. Keep your drinks with you at all times as drinks can be spiked with drugs to make you more vulnerable to assault. Be aware that accidents are more likely to happen after drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Avoid swimming or fooling around on balconies or other high places. If you have an accident or injure yourself while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, it is unlikely that your insurance policy will cover you.

Be aware of what may happen if you become involved with drugs overseas. Not only are there health risks, but there may also be severe penalties for any association with drugs. Never carry packages through customs for other people and be cautious about accepting gifts. If you are driving, do not lend your vehicle to other people and do not sit in someone else's vehicle when going through customs or crossing borders – get out and walk. Pack your own baggage, fasten it securely and do not leave it unattended. The FCO have a leaflet called 'Drugs: Information for Travellers' which will give you more information. Details are on the FCO 'Our Publications' page.

Occupational Hygiene Unit  
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The Health and Safety Department acknowledges the help of the University's International Office and Insurance Office in the compiling of this guidance.

For further guidance and advice contact Candice Schmid, the Health and Safety Adviser, 51 4261 or [Occupational.Hygiene@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Occupational.Hygiene@ed.ac.uk).