

Personal Safety While Travelling Abroad

University of Alberta Protective Services

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I. Introduction

The primary purpose of this handbook is to provide realistic, proactive safety techniques intended to enhance personal safety and security while travelling abroad. It also contains information about how to protect yourself and your family at home.

The precautions required for any particular trip will depend on the risk assessment and pre-departure considerations found in this handbook. Protective Services is available and willing to help plan and implement realistic protective measures so that you can enjoy a safe trip abroad.

Become familiar with this handbook before you travel but do not carry it with you on your trip. For more information on personal safety and security, contact Sgt. Grace Berry, certified Personal Protection Specialist, Protective Services, 780-492-5957 or grace.berry@ualberta.ca

II. Pre-departure Considerations

1. Threat Assessment

The key to prevention and planning for emergencies is to look at the history and types of incidents relative to your destination and area of travel. Before departing, research the destination and gather up-to-date, site specific information regarding the risks or dangers presented. This includes but is not limited to kidnappings, terrorism, military/law enforcement corruption, protest threats, and weather conditions (hurricane season, flooding, etc). Be familiar with the local laws, religious traditions, customs, currency, business practices and standards of dress and behavior. Consultation with the host institution (if applicable) is highly recommended.

Planning for personal safety is identifying and avoiding as many risks as possible. Advance communication and emergency planning is critical, particularly for travel to regions that are deemed as high or extreme risk. International locations may be deemed as high or extreme risk when there are substantial hazards that planning cannot minimize. This includes countries or regions that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Canada have advised travelers to avoid. Should the travel risk be deemed high or extreme, assess whether it is critical to travel to that region at that time.

Other important considerations:

- University operations may be at risk when members of University senior administration travel together on the same plane.
- Escort protection by professionals may be necessary for travel to high or extreme risk areas.
- Travel insurance is highly recommended in the event the trip is cancelled due to the level of risk presented prior to the scheduled departure date.

- For a list of Country Travel Reports and Warnings and analysis of the changing risks in the country you intend to visit, please go to the DFAIT website at www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/ctry/reportpage-en.asp

2. Travel Abroad Emergency Support Program

Registering in the Travel Abroad Emergency Support program is vital in the event that you require University emergency assistance, or the University becomes aware of a crisis situation in the area to which you are travelling, or to inform you of a family emergency at home. You will also be notified of crisis situations that seriously threaten the University of Alberta and whether the incident calls for your immediate return.

Your family and one or two staff members should be well aware of your travel itinerary and know whom to contact in the event of an emergency or crisis. Before you depart, take ten minutes with your family to develop a personal emergency preparedness plan. You will not be with your family when an emergency occurs so it will help them in knowing what to do. Plan how to contact one another and discuss what you would do in different scenarios at home and abroad. Provide them with a complete itinerary of your flights and hotels, informing them of any changes. It is critical that you, your family and emergency contact (as noted on the Emergency Support Program Registration Form) know whom to call and what to do in the event of a crisis and are familiar with the Emergency Procedures found in this guide.

Make photocopies of your passport, driver's license, medical insurance, medical history, prescriptions, and airline tickets. Keep a set of copies with you during your trip and another set in a safe place known to your emergency contact.

Please complete the Travel Abroad-Emergency Support Program Registration Form prior to your departure. You are responsible for updating the information in this form if your plans change. The form can be found at: <http://www.protectiveservices.ualberta.ca/en/Services/ESP.aspx>

3. Registration of Canadians Abroad (R.O.C.A)

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Canada offers a registration service for all Canadians travelling or living abroad. This service is provided so that the Canadian government can contact and assist you in the event of an emergency such as a natural disaster or civil unrest, or inform you of a family emergency at home. Carry contact information for the Canadian government offices abroad in the countries you plan to visit.

The information collected in the R.O.C.A Registration Form is subject to the Canadian Privacy Act and may only be disclosed to a third party as deemed appropriate by the Department of Foreign Affairs. Registration in both the Travel Abroad-Emergency Support Program in addition to R.O.C.A is highly recommended.

For a link to the R.O.C.A. Registration Form and other services, please visit the DFAIT website at <http://voyage.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/faq/roca-eng.asp>

4. Emergency Preparedness

- Check your @ualberta e-mail account regularly.
- Ensure that you learn to use the local phone system and are familiar with the emergency telephone numbers for police, fire and ambulance in your area of travel (comparable to 911). Adding these telephone numbers to your cell phone is a simple and effective precaution.
- Familiarize yourself with the location of safe havens such as police stations, fire halls and hospitals.
- Know the location and contact information for the consulate in your area of travel.
- If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, contact the nearest Canadian embassy or consulate for assistance.
- If a crime has been attempted or committed, contact the police service of jurisdiction as appropriate, then initiate Emergency Procedures (below).
- Stay informed about developments in the area of your travels by listening to the local radio and watching the local news.

5. Emergency Procedures

1. If you experience an emergency or crisis while abroad, or are the victim of a crime, notify the local police and contact Protective Services, who will in turn contact the appropriate University personnel to provide assistance.
2. Dial the International Country Code for Canada. For a detailed listing of country codes please visit www.countrycodes.com
3. **Dial (780) 492-5050.** Protective Services operates 24 hours/7 days a week, and collect calls are accepted. You may also send an emergency email to travelemergency@ualberta.ca. The emergency email address is also monitored 24/7 by Communication Centre personnel.
4. Identify yourself by name and give the country where you are currently located.
5. State the nature of your emergency.
6. Provide Communication Centre personnel with your current contact information.

III. Personal Safety and Security Abroad

1. General Precautions

- Always carry your passport with you when travelling. Never place your passport or other important/sensitive documents in your checked luggage.
- Passports should be reviewed on a regular basis. A new passport should be obtained if the passport bears entry, exit or visa stamps for volatile countries, such as those in the Middle East.
- Monitor the news and listen to local news broadcasts concerning ongoing situations.
- Travel as anonymously as possible. Do not wear or carry anything with the University name or logo.
- Airline tickets, ticket jackets and itineraries should be issued using only Mr. or Ms. Do not use company titles or professional forms of address such as “Dr.” or “Prof.”
- If possible, in higher risk regions use a personal credit card instead of a corporate card displaying “University of Alberta.”
- Travel in casual dress and leave conspicuous items such as jewelry, gold watches and expensive luggage at home. Valuables tend to attract unwanted attention.
- Do not carry more cash or credit cards than you need at the moment.
- Avoid giving an interview or conducting business other than with a properly accredited person in a recognized place of business and during the prescribed hours for doing so. You are the best judge of this.
- Avoid areas and establishments frequented by military personnel of any nation.
- Be aware of your surroundings and avoid crowded places if possible. Consider the level of security when visiting public places, including markets, hotels, restaurants etc.

2. Airport Security

Please visit the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (C.A.T.S.A) website at <http://www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca/> for additional information on carry-on baggage restrictions, travel advice and security screening procedures.

- Luggage should not call attention to the University or affiliation. Baggage tags should bear only your name and phone number. Do not use University of Alberta logos on luggage tags, t-shirts, jackets, bags or other items that can be recognized.
- Pack and lock your own bags and know all the contents. Once packed, keep them locked and do not let them out of your custody until you check them at the airport.
- Keep prescription drugs in their original container with a copy of the prescription. If you have a condition requiring medication, make sure you take more than enough with you to cover any emergency that might occur during your trip.
- Do not take or carry any baggage or parcels from another person.
- Avoid people receiving special attention from the airline.

- Upon arrival watch for anyone who appears to be watching the area or paying close attention to baggage tags in order to identify a target. Stand back and survey the area.
- If being met at the airport, know the name(s) of the persons meeting you and get a rough physical description. Do not accompany anyone who does not fit the description or claims to have been sent in place of the person you expected unless this can be verified.
- If meeting another traveler at the airport, do not stand near waste containers, which are typical locations for explosive devices. Also steer clear of unattended luggage or boxes. If possible, tell your party to meet you in an access-controlled section and wait there.
- If there is an influx of uniformed security and/or police officers, quickly find and take shelter in a protected area, such as behind a support column, vending machine or upholstered furniture. Locate the nearest emergency exits.
- If evacuated in a group, take position in the center of the group with as many people around you as possible. Do not take the lead or straggle behind.

3. Air Hijacking

- Avoid making eye contact with perpetrators, especially within the first 20 minutes to an hour of a plane takeover.
- If the hijackers collect valuables and passports, do not hide or attempt to withhold any items or articles.
- Concentrate on being as quiet and inconspicuous as possible.
- Do not speak to other passengers. If the perpetrators have any reason to think that you are plotting something, they are likely to harm you.
- Do not ask the perpetrators for favors such as permission to smoke, move to another seat or use the washroom.
- Do not refuse an offer of food, beverages or tobacco, and only consume in moderation. As a precaution, if you are offered an alcoholic drink, accept it but do not drink it.
- If possible, avoid turning your back to the perpetrator, especially to the individual who appears to be in command of the hijacking.
- Do not attempt to negotiate with the perpetrator or offer opinions to them.
- Remain as calm as possible throughout the hijacking and conserve your energy.
- Prepare yourself psychologically for the possibility that you may be questioned at gunpoint.
- Speak only when you are spoken to.
- Mentally rehearse a plausible and unremarkable account of your employment and the specific reason for your being on the airplane.
- Even if heat inside the airplane becomes uncomfortable, continue to wear as much clothing as you can tolerate.
- If the hijacking becomes a prolonged incident and you must sleep, try to do so in short naps.
- Use your time to evaluate the situation and consider your options in various situations, such as a passenger struggle or escape opportunity.

4. Vehicle Security

- Remember that a flashy and/or expensive vehicle increases your risk of becoming a target of crime.
- It is safer to keep windows closed and doors locked while driving. Always close and lock your vehicle when parked.
- Valuable items should not be visible from the outside of the vehicle. If you must travel with valuable items, lock them in the trunk. Never leave your purse or wallet in the vehicle.
- As a precaution, keep the fuel tank full or near full, and make sure the tank is lockable.

5. Vehicle Travel

- In higher risk countries, travel in a vehicle that is rented immediately before or upon your arrival—not in a hotel shuttle.
- When travelling in high-risk regions, change vehicles periodically. This is important in high-risk kidnap regions.
- Vary your departure times and be aware of others who may be watching you coming and going, especially from the hotel or airport.
- Vary your routes. Familiarize yourself with the location of police stations, hospitals, military posts or other places that could be used as a safe haven in case of emergency.
- Be as inconspicuous as possible. Use vehicles that do not attract unwanted attention.
- Avoid public transportation. If it is necessary either hail a passing taxi or use one from a stand. Avoid unmarked taxis.
- Keep the vehicle's hood, trunk and gas cap secured.
- Keep doors and windows locked at all times.
- Do not lower windows more than two inches for ventilation or to speak to someone outside the vehicle.
- Avoid driving on remote roads whenever possible.
- Never pick up hitchhikers or strangers.
- Keep your vehicle at a distance from the curb. Drive as close as possible to the centerline so the vehicle cannot be forced to the curb.
- When stopping at a traffic signal, keep enough distance from the vehicle in front to allow your vehicle room for evasive maneuvering.
- Park your vehicle in a well lit area. Whenever approaching your vehicle, make sure that no one is near the vehicle, underneath or inside.
- If carjacked, surrender the vehicle and do not resist. Move away from the vehicle, call the police and initiate the Emergency Procedures (page 5).
- If you are followed by another vehicle, get the license plate number and dial the emergency number for police. Drive to the nearest police station or any other location where you are not isolated. Do not allow the vehicle to force you to the side of the road.

6. Street Security

- Always be mindful of your surroundings; trust your instincts.
- High-crime areas should be identified and avoided.
- Clutch briefcases or handbags tightly. Place wallets in your front trouser or inside jacket pocket.
- Keep a low profile in terms of behavior, voice and dress.
- Avoid deserted streets or walking alone, especially at night.
- Shop in reputable, well known stores and avoid street vendors.
- When making a purchase, select and remove only the credit card or cash needed for that transaction without exposing the contents of your wallet or purse.
- Avoid public demonstrations. Do not openly criticize local customs.
- Do not stop to give directions to pedestrians or motorists.
- If being followed, stay on illuminated streets and seek help.
- If attacked, do not resist unless you sense it would be more dangerous to cooperate. If you decide to resist, yell and use whatever means possible to physically resist the assailant and escape. Run towards lights and people and initiate Emergency Procedures (page 5).

7. Information Security

- Keep a cell phone with you at all times. Use an unlisted number if possible.
- Use a landline when discussing confidential, private or privileged subject matter.
- Only provide personal information or other confidential information over the phone if you initiate the contact or know the recipient person or organization.
- Maintain your computer or laptop in a safe/secure location and change passwords regularly.
- Do not carry hard copies of University reports that contain sensitive information.
- Should you receive a threatening phone call, obtain as much information as possible. When the call is over, write down all the information you can remember, such as the emotional state of the caller or background noise. Try to identify the voice by gender, age, and accent; then contact the police and initiate Emergency Procedures (page 5).

8. Hotel Security

- When registering at the hotel, use only your name. Do not provide your title or the purpose of your visit to hotel and restaurant personnel.
- When registering at the hotel, remove your identification or credit card from your wallet or purse without exposing the other contents of your wallet, briefcase, or handbag. Do not use your corporate credit card if it can be avoided.
- Be familiar with the location of entrances, exits, elevators, stairways and fire escapes.
- Do not leave documents in your hotel room that identify the University of Alberta or the purpose of your visit. Keep University property, valuables and personal information in the hotel or room safe. If utilizing the hotel room safe ensure that it is permanently mounted to the floor or wall.

- Do not provide personal information to hotel staff or strangers in hotel bars, lobbies or restaurants.
- Be cautious about what you discuss over hotel phones.
- Secure hotel rooms and doors using all available locks. Use the peep hole.
- Do not respond to loudspeaker calls in the lobby or dining room of the hotel unless you are expecting a call or caller.
- Avoid leaving the hotel at the same time and following the same route every day.

9. Abduction and Extortion

You can take specific steps to reduce the risk of kidnap while at home and abroad. Consider that most abductions for ransom take place on weekday mornings on public streets between the victim's residence and office or school. Abductors watch their targets and use a victim's routine and predictability to their advantage.

The three most important measures to avoid being abducted are to vary routines, be alert and react. Vary times, routes, patterns, mode of transportation, locations and any other activity that can be used to predict your presence at a certain place and time.

- Be alert to your surroundings, and be suspicious. Trust your intuition. Know the typical situation and environment and notice things that are unusual or potentially dangerous. Make note of suspicions such as a license plate or strangers in the area.
- Do not share your personal information, such as finances, net worth, investment and business dealings with anyone unless necessary. Work with your family and business colleagues to maintain a similar and consistent level of confidentiality.
- Make a plan. If you see something or someone that is suspicious, react immediately.
- Identify the safe havens along your various routes.
- Keep your car windows and doors closed and locked, especially at night and when travelling in high risk countries and unsafe neighborhoods.
- If travelling to a high risk location, your family should have a sum of money on hand, day and night, in order to provide mutual assistance rapidly.
- Do not respond immediately or directly to extortionists.
- Do not resist armed attackers. If abducted, be patient and do as you are told but no more.

References

The following documents were used as references for this handbook:

- Personal Safety Handbook-Protecting Yourself and Your Family At Home and Abroad. Clayton Consultants, Inc.
- Safety Abroad Manual, University of Toronto (with permission).