

Costa Rica 2017-18



Study Abroad Handbook

A useful guide to your
study abroad experience



OVERSEAS STUDY

*Read this handbook **now** and **again** before you leave the U.S.
Consult it **again** before you register for classes overseas.
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PREDEPARTURE CHECKLIST

- Apply for a passport **immediately**
- Pay prepayment as instructed.
- Register yourself in the authorized OVST course as directed by Overseas Study
- Return the Medical History form to Overseas Study
- Pay Overseas Study fees to Bursar.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

December 27

La Rosa Del Paseo, San Jose
Tel: 506 (2) 257-3225
<http://larosadelpaseo.com/en/>
E-mail: info@larosadelpaseo.com

December 28-December 29

Ecolodge San Luis & Research Station
Santa Elena de Monteverde, Puntarenas
Tel: 506 (2) 645-7363
Fax: 506 (2) 645-7362
www.ugacostarica.com
E-mail: progcr@uga.edu

December 30-December 31

Hotel Boyeros, Liberia, Guanacaste
Tel: 506 (2) 666-0722 or 666-0809
Fax: 506 (2) 666-2529
www.hotelboyeros.com
E-mail: liberia@hotelboyeros.com

January 1-January 4

La Selva, San Pedro
Organization for Tropical Studies
Field Station
Tel: 506 (2) 766-6565
Fax: 506 (2) 766-6535
www.ots.ac.cr
E-mail: info@tropicalstudies.org

January 5

Mirador de Quetzales Lodge
Tel: 506 (2) 200-4185
<http://www.quetzalesdecostarica.com>
E-mail: info@elmiradordequetzales.com

January 6-7

Hotel Pacande
Tel: 506 (2) 443-8481
<http://hotelpacande.com>
E-mail: info@hotelpacande.com

COSTA RICA ITINERARY

NOTE: Parentheses indicate the night's lodgings

- December 27** Arrive in San Jose, orientation meeting, rest of evening free (La Rosa Del Paseo)
- December 28-29** Drive to Ecolodge San Luis
- December 30** Drive to Liberia in afternoon (Hotel Boyeros)
- December 31** Visit Pacific Beach at Tamarindo, boat tour of mangroves (Hotel Boyeros)
- January 1** Drive to La Selva Field Station, stop at Arenal Volcano National Park
- January 1-4** La Selva
- January 5** Drive to Mirador de Quetzales
- January 6** Day trip to Cerro de la Muerte, drive to San Jose (Hotel Pacande)
- January 7** Depart for home

ICONS IN THIS GUIDE



Helpful Program Information

Information to help prepare you for study abroad



Student Advice

Suggestions from study abroad returnees



Savvy Traveler Tips

Traveling tips to get you where you're going

Preparing for Departure

Course Registration

The Office of Overseas Study will authorize you to register in a special OVST (Overseas Study) course number designated for your program. You will receive instructions from Overseas Study about enrolling in the specific section for your program. You cannot register for the program if your bursar record shows any principal balance (however small) from a preceding semester.

Credit for the Costa Rica program is awarded as 3 credits of BIOL-L 433 on your spring schedule and is considered to be separate from on-campus registration. IU Bloomington students could still enroll in an additional 12-18 credit hours and fall within the flat-fee tuition rate.

Grades & Credits

You will earn 3 IU credits in L433, Tropical Biology for your academic work on the Costa Rica program. This course is rigorous and covers a great deal of material rapidly. Your professors will expect you to be fully engaged in the course. The course may not be taken on a P/F basis.

Guidebooks

Though you will have little time for outside exploration, a good guidebook will add to your understanding of Costa Rica. Valuable guidebooks for budget travelers include the *Lonely Planet* series and *The Costa Rica Handbook* (Moon Travel Publications).

Medical History

This program will impose significant physical demands, so it is important that you be in good health and that the resident directors have complete knowledge about your health history and any recurring health problems.

Packing

Although Costa Rica's dry season starts in mid-December, you will spend much of your time in the aptly named rainforest where humidity dampens your clothes and the high altitudes add a chill. During the program you will experience weather that varies from hot and humid to quite cool. Expect to be wet and muddy on occasion. Clothes should be loose, lightweight and fast-drying.



STUDENT ADVICE

Count on living less comfortably than you are at home. It's fairly comparable to tent camping even though you spend every single night in a bed of some sort.

Pack the following:

- Soft hat to protect from sun and insects
- 3 pairs of long pants
- 3 long-sleeved shirts with pockets
- Shorts, T-shirts
- Sweatshirt or sweater
- Windbreaker
- Swimming suit and small- to medium-sized towel
- Handkerchiefs (one large bandanna for your neck or head)
- Sneakers
- Hiking boots (medium height, lightweight)
- Folding umbrella or poncho
- Small flashlight
- Notebook, pencils, Sharpie pens
- Pocketknife (medium-sized Swiss Army knife is best)
- Binoculars (small, easy to carry size)
- Plastic bags (for notebook, camera, items carried in field)
- Insect repellent
- Camera
- Scotch tape
- Toilet kit and compact first aid kit (Band-Aids, bacitracin, aspirin, sunscreen, foot powder)
- Sunglasses, extra pair of prescription glasses or contact lenses
- Travel alarm clock
- Plastic hangers and small amount of laundry soap
- Paperback leisure reading, Spanish phrasebook
- Daypack for field gear (notebook, camera, poncho, insect repellent, lunch, drinking water)
- Plastic water bottle
- Guidebooks and notes



Savvy Traveler Tips

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"On this trip, nobody cares if you wear the same thing a hundred times."



Savvy Traveler Tips

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"If you go on this trip, you should bring snacks, sunscreen, a positive attitude and a lot of motivation to learn and get dirty!"

"Bring [at least] one nice thing to wear for New Year's Eve or going out."

Passport

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A valid passport is required to enter Costa Rica. Apply immediately for a passport at a post office or county clerk's office. You can also download an application from the Web (www.travel.state.gov). First time applicants must submit the completed application in person along with a certified birth certificate copy, photo ID, two recent passport photos, and \$135 (payable by cash, personal check or money order). Your passport will be valid for 10 years. It takes several weeks to get a passport so apply as soon as possible.

You can check the status of your passport application online at: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports.html>

Make two photocopies of the page in your passport that has your name and photo. Leave one copy with your family and take one to Costa Rica. Keep it in a separate place from the passport itself. A photocopy will make replacement easier should the original be lost or stolen. You may want to scan a copy and save it in stored e-mail so that you can access it electronically.

Scholarships & Loans

Applying for aid: If you need a loan to cover program costs, contact your campus office of Student Financial Assistance immediately to clarify the application procedures.

Airfare and nonrefundable prepayment: Loan checks cannot be released before early January, so you will have to arrange for other funds, such as a temporary loan from a family member, to pay your airfare and the nonrefundable prepayment to Overseas Study. Overseas Study scholarships may not be applied to the nonrefundable prepayment.

Students outside Bloomington: If you are a student at IUPUI or a regional campus, arrange for your campus Office of Student Financial Assistance to send a consortium agreement to Overseas Study for confirmation that you are not receiving duplicate aid.

Withdrawal & Refund Policies

Withdrawal from a Program

If you do decide to withdraw from this program, it is your responsibility to send a formal statement to Overseas Study (overseas@iu.edu), outlining the reason for withdrawal.

Do not cancel or change your registration.

Overseas Study will notify the Office of Student Financial Assistance of your withdrawal. Please note that students who withdraw after a program begins should expect to repay any financial assistance awarded for the program.

Refund Policy

Nonrefundable prepayment(s): The prepayments paid for any IU program will **NOT** be refunded under any circumstances.

Withdrawal before the program begins: If you withdraw from the program after you have registered or have paid the fees but before the program begins, Overseas Study will remove the charges or refund all of the fees paid to IU except the nonrefundable prepayment(s) and any other fees that are non-recoverable at the time of withdrawal.

Do not cancel or change your registration.

Withdrawal after the program begins: If you withdraw from the program after it begins, you must send a formal statement to Overseas Study that indicates the last day you attended and explains the arrangements you have made with the onsite administration for finalizing participation. Overseas Study will consider a partial refund of fees only 1) if you become seriously ill or 2) if an emergency requires you to return to the U.S. In these cases, the amount of the refund will be determined individually on the basis

of costs recoverable by Overseas Study at the time of withdrawal. **Do not cancel or change your registration.**

Program cancellation: In the unlikely event that IU cancels a program, Overseas Study will determine refunds based on each individual case. Factors include the timing of the cancellation, number of students affected, housing situation, negotiation of recoverable housing costs and other program-related fees. The amount of credit already completed and the opportunities for students to complete courses through alternative arrangements will also be considered.

Safety & Responsibility

Indiana University will work to protect your health and safety overseas, but you must take responsibility for the results of your decisions, choices and behavior. Before the program, read carefully and consider the information given to you by the Office of Overseas Study regarding your health and any special needs; and together with your family, review the Overseas Study safety and responsibility guidelines (Appendix B or <http://overseas.iu.edu>). Also review the checklist of health and safety items for you to prepare and consider for your study abroad experience (http://overseas.iu.edu/docs/HSS_Checklist.pdf). You are also encouraged to consult the State Department Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings (<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html>) and the Centers for Disease Control web site (www.cdc.gov). While IU can provide information about health and safety issues, we cannot eliminate all risks from a study abroad environment or ensure that U.S. standards of due process will be applied in legal proceedings outside this country. Please be especially alert to the following aspects of living abroad, which may not at first appear to you as safety or health issues:

Illegal Drugs

Avoid illegal drugs. Drugs can impair your judgment in situations that require increased awareness. In addition, penalties abroad can be very severe if you violate local drug laws. Remember that you will not be eligible for U.S. legal protection, and you will be held to the laws of the country where you are living.

Alcohol

One of the best ways to protect yourself abroad is to avoid excessive drinking. Although alcohol may be more accessible at your program site than in the U.S., if you drink alcohol at all, do so in moderation. Not only may inebriation be culturally offensive, more importantly, it can impair your judgment in critical moments when you most need to be alert (e.g., driving, finding your way home late at night, socializing with strangers, etc.).

Hazardous Activities

Students abroad sometimes participate in new activities in which they are not well-practiced or proficient. Be cautious if you are attempting any activity that has an element of danger or risk, particularly if you are far from assistance. These activities can include but are not limited to rock climbing, cliff jumping, snorkeling, bungee jumping, skydiving and skiing.

Many insurance companies will not cover accidents that occur during engagement in sports or activities deemed to be dangerous, including those listed above. For more information about insurance exclusions, see Appendix A. Extra insurance or special riders can often be purchased.

Emotional Problems

You are likely to experience some form of culture shock during your time abroad, but this should not be confused with a real emotional crisis. If you feel withdrawn or detached and cannot cope with your environment, ask the program director onsite for guidance and/or a recommendation for a skilled health care provider.

If your problem involves an eating disorder, share your burden with someone before you become seriously weakened.

Any medication that you take for a mental health condition should be continued during your time abroad since an interruption in medication can produce serious consequences.

Public Disturbances

Keep a low profile during political events abroad that may be anti-American in nature. At such times, avoid places that attract Americans and dress to fit in with the local culture. Be wary about unattended packages or backpacks in public places like subways, trains and buses and report such unclaimed objects to a local authority.

In the event of public disturbances abroad—including violent demonstrations, terrorist acts and natural disasters—get in touch with your program staff to report on your own situation and to find out how the event may impact you as well as others around you. Also contact your friends and family, if possible, since they may hear about the disturbances on the news and will be concerned for your safety.

Sexual Harassment

If you feel you may be the victim of sexual harassment, consult the Program Directors immediately to help you sort out the difference between unacceptable harassment and culturally acceptable behavior which is nonetheless uncomfortable for you. In the case of sexual harassment, you may need to file a report at the local police station with the assistance of the resident directors.

Dating & Sexual Behavior

A survey on dating and sexual behavior while abroad was recently conducted of IU study abroad returnees. Although each person will make individual choices regarding relationship(s) while abroad, knowing the experiences of some of your peers might provide some useful insights.

In terms of whom students date, they report dating more host nationals than program participants, and men seem to be involved in a greater number of relationships than women. Students also reported that sexual norms differed from the United States. It is important to understand the norms of the country where you will be studying. You can learn about these through various sources - books, guidebooks to some extent, discussions with host nationals and observing the behavior of others. Many students reported that their relationships abroad gave them access to a greater understanding of the culture in which they lived. Others reported that by not engaging in serious relationships they were able to gain more since they could focus on other activities. Consider all these issues if you plan on being involved in a relationship, sexual or otherwise, while studying abroad.

The survey also indicates that the patterns students form while at IU in terms of (a) being sexually active or not, and (b) using methods of pregnancy prevention and STD protection largely carry over when they study abroad. If you anticipate being sexually active while abroad, consider bringing a supply of the pregnancy and STD prevention protection you currently use.

Safety in Costa Rica

While you will spend most of your time hiking as a class and studying the flora and fauna of the rainforest, you will spend a little free time in more public places. Pickpocketing is the most common security issue you will face in Costa Rica and is on the rise as tourism grows. Practice common sense.

- Avoid crowded areas where you are most likely to be robbed. Don't use narrow alleys or poorly-lit streets.
- Avoid traveling alone at night.
- Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will jostle you, ask for directions or the time, point to something spilled on your clothing, or distract you by causing a disturbance. Beware of groups of vagrant children who create a distraction while picking your pocket.
- Keep valuables secured. A thief on a bicycle or motorcycle may attempt to grab a knapsack or purse hanging on one shoulder.
- Try to seem purposeful while you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know what you are doing.
- Stay aware of your surroundings and the people around you.

WATER SAFETY ABROAD

- Exercise caution when walking near the water's edge.
- NEVER swim after consuming alcohol or food.
- Never swim alone.
- Swim within your depth and parallel to the shore.
- Always swim, or surf, in areas patrolled by lifeguards.
- Swim in the designated swimming area when bathing in the sea.
- Obey all the usual safety rules that apply in any properly run pool e.g. no running, no running dives, no horseplay etc.
- Ensure that you do not dive into shallow water.

You cannot always have confidence that American standards of oversight and public safety precautions are in place in locations abroad. Areas of potential danger may not be marked; lifeguards may not be trained. Exercise extreme caution.

Appendix A

Health Insurance Summary of Benefits

Participants in IU-administered overseas study programs are enrolled in a group health insurance plan administered by GeoBlue. The primary accident and sickness policy is underwritten by 4 Ever Life International Limited. Coverage within the U.S. (if you return briefly for a holiday, vacation, or family crisis) is limited to \$5,000, but when you are abroad during the period of the program, the policy provides coverage for up to \$250,000 for accident or illness anywhere worldwide. Generally, you pay the physician or hospital at the time of treatment and then file a claim for reimbursement directly with GeoBlue.

Medical Benefits

The policy will pay 100% of the Eligible Medical Expenses (limited to the Reasonable Expenses) incurred within 52 weeks from the date of an accident or the commencement of a sickness, up to a maximum limit of \$200,000 per accident or sickness.

Eligible Expenses

1. Physician office visits.
2. Hospital charges, which include charges for all general nursing services, are limited to Reasonable Expenses for semi-private accommodations. Intensive Care Facility charges are limited to Reasonable Expenses.
3. Laboratory, diagnostic and x-ray examinations.
4. Outpatient prescription drugs, 100% of actual charge up to a maximum of \$25,000 per coverage year, limited to a 31 day supply for initial fill or refill.
5. Rental or purchase of durable medical equipment, whichever is less.
6. Professional ambulance service to nearest hospital.
7. Outpatient treatment of nervous or mental disorders, drug or alcohol abuse to reasonable expense.
8. Reasonable expenses incurred for treatment of specified therapies, including acupuncture and physiotherapy up to 20 visits per coverage year on an outpatient basis.
9. Expenses incurred for treatment of injuries sustained as a result of covered motor vehicle accident, benefits paid up to a maximum of \$25,000.
10. Repairs to sound natural teeth required due to an injury, up to \$500 per coverage year.

This is a simplified summary of policy coverage. For a complete description of all benefits and exclusions, visit www.geobluestudents.com.

Medical Evacuation

The Company will pay, as a result of a covered injury or sickness, and upon the written accompaniment, up to \$250,000. Evacuation may be to his/her natural country or to a hospital elsewhere. Any expenses in respect to Medical Evacuation require prior approval by GeoBlue. Call one of the numbers listed below certification of the attending physician, for air evacuation of the insured, including physician or nurse.

Bedside Visit

If it is determined that a Covered Member is expected to require hospitalization in excess of 3 days at the location to which a Covered Member is to be evacuated, an economy round-trip airfare will be provided to the place of hospitalization for an individual chosen by the Covered Member. If it is determined that a Covered Member is expected to require hospitalization, due to an Injury or sickness for more than 3 days or are in critical condition, GeoBlue will pay up to the maximum benefit of \$3,000 for the cost of one economy round-trip air fare ticket and the hotel accommodations in the location of the Covered Member's hospital confinement for one person designated by the Covered Member. Payment for meals, ground transportation and other incidentals are the responsibility of the family member or friend. With respect to any one trip, this benefit is payable only once for that trip, regardless of the number of Covered Persons on that trip. The determination of whether the Covered Member will be hospitalized for more than 3 days or is in critical condition shall be made by the GeoBlue after consultation with the attending physician. No more than one (1) visit may be made during any Period of Coverage. No benefits are payable unless the trip is approved in advance by the GeoBlue.

Repatriation

In event of the death of the covered person, the Company will pay for those expenses as may reasonably be incurred up to \$25,000 in connection with the preparation and transportation of the body to the person's place of residence in his/her home country. This benefit does not include the transportation of anyone accompanying the body, visitation or funeral expenses. Any expenses in respect to repatriation require prior approval by GeoBlue.

From within the U.S.	1-844-257-4823
Outside U.S.	1-610-254-8771 (collect)
E-mail	<i>globalhealth@geo-blue.com</i>

Reimbursement of Expenses

To file for reimbursement, send claim forms (available at each program site) and appropriate documentation from physician or hospital directly to:

GeoBlue

Attn: Claims Department

P.O. Box 1748

Southeastern, PA 19399-1748 USA

Fax: 610-482-9623

Email: claims@geo-blue.com

Because the health and safety of its study abroad participants are primary concerns



Appendix B

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Indiana University

Safety & Responsibility Guidelines

at Indiana University, these guidelines have been developed to provide useful practical guidance to institutional representatives, student participants, and their parents/guardians/families. No set of guidelines can guarantee the health and safety needs of each individual involved in a study abroad program, but the following address issues of general concern and the responsibilities of all parties. It is not possible to account for all the inevitable variations in actual cases, so those involved must also rely upon their experience and thoughtful judgment while considering the unique circumstances of each situation.

A. Responsibilities of the Office of Overseas Study

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The Office of Overseas Study has university-wide responsibility for all Indiana University study abroad programs, though that responsibility may be shared with other campuses (e.g., the Office of International Affairs at IUPUI and the Office of International Programs at IU South Bend) or professional schools (e.g., Kelley School of Business, School of Public and Environmental Affairs, School of Law, etc.). In the case of co-sponsored programs, this responsibility is delegated to other institutional providers (e.g., CIEE, IES, DIS, etc.), with Overseas Study in a consultative role.

IU study abroad programs are those which have been approved by the university-wide Overseas Study Advisory Council (OSAC), as required by Presidential directive. Study abroad initiatives which attempt to proceed without the approval of OSAC have no official status as IU programs and cannot advertise themselves as such. Independent initiatives risk being cancelled, and credit for their participants denied upon review.

The following responsibilities of the Office of Overseas Study apply only to approved IU programs abroad:

1. Conduct regular assessments of health and safety conditions for IU programs, including program-sponsored accommodation, events, excursions and other activities, prior to program. Monitor possible changes in country conditions. Provide information about changes and advise participants and their parents/guardians/families as needed. Develop and maintain emergency preparedness and crisis response plans.
2. Provide guidelines for program directors and staff with respect to managing emergencies abroad.
3. Provide orientation meetings and materials to participants prior to departure for the program and onsite, which include appropriate information on health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in the host country. In

addition to dealing with health and safety issues, the orientation should address potential health and safety risks, and appropriate emergency response measures. Ask students to share this information with their parents/guardians/families so they can make informed decisions concerning preparation, participation, and behavior while on the program

4. Consider health and safety issues in evaluating the appropriateness of an individual's participation in a study abroad program.
5. In the participant screening process, consider factors such as disciplinary history that may impact on the safety of the individual or the group.
6. Provide students with information on the role of and assistance provided by the onsite resident director or program coordinator.
7. Discuss with students, following their selection but prior to their participation in a study abroad program, individual health and disciplinary history issues that may impact on the safety of the individual or the group.
8. Provide health insurance (including emergency evacuation and repatriation) to participants or assure that participants receive information about how to obtain such coverage.
9. Direct onsite program staff to provide information for participants and their parents/guardians/families regarding available medical and support services, and to help participants obtain the services they may need.
10. Hire vendors and contractors (e.g. travel and tour agents) that have provided reputable services in the country in which the program takes place. Advise such vendors and contractors of the program sponsor's expectations with respect to their role in the health and safety of participants.
11. Communicate applicable codes of conduct and the consequences of noncompliance to participants. Take appropriate action when participants are in violation.
12. In cases of serious health problems, injury, or other significant health and safety circumstances, maintain good communication among all program sponsors
13. Provide these guidelines to participants and their parents/guardians/families regarding when and where the responsibility of the IU Office of Overseas Study ends, and the aspects of participants' overseas experiences that are beyond the control of Overseas Study. In particular, Overseas Study generally:
 - a) Cannot guarantee or ensure the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from the study abroad environments;
 - b) Cannot monitor or control all of the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants;
 - c) Cannot prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous or unwise activities;
 - d) Cannot ensure that U.S. standards of due process apply in overseas legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for participants;
 - e) Cannot ensure that home-country cultural values and norms will apply in

the host country;

- f) Cannot fully replicate home campus support services at overseas locations;
- g) Cannot assume responsibility for the actions of persons not employed or otherwise engaged by Overseas Study, for events that are not part of the program, or that are beyond the control of Overseas Study and its subcontractors, or for situations that may arise due to the failure of a participant to disclose pertinent information.

B. Responsibilities of Participants

In Study Abroad, as in other settings, participants can have a major impact on their own health and safety abroad through the decisions they make before and during the program and by their day-to-day choices and behaviors.

Participants should:

1. Participate fully in all orientations before departure and onsite, and read and carefully consider all information provided by Overseas Study that relates to safety and health conditions in host countries.
2. When applying for or accepting a place in a program, consider carefully their health and other personal circumstances, and assume responsibility for them after acceptance.
3. Make available to Overseas Study accurate and complete physical and mental health information and any other personal data that are necessary in planning for a safe and healthy study abroad experience.
4. Obtain and maintain supplementary health insurance coverage and liability insurance, if necessary, and abide by any conditions imposed by the carriers.
5. Inform parents/guardians/families, and any others who may need to know, about their participation in the study abroad program, provide them with emergency contact information, and keep them informed on an ongoing basis.
6. Understand and comply with the terms of participation, codes of academic and ethical conduct, and emergency procedures of the program, and obey host country laws.
7. Once onsite, be aware of local conditions and customs that may present health or safety risks when making daily choices and decisions. Promptly express any health or safety concerns to the program staff or other appropriate individuals.
8. Become familiar with the procedures for obtaining health and law enforcement services in the host country.
9. Avoid substance abuse of all kinds.
10. Follow the program policies for keeping program staff informed of their whereabouts and well-being, especially when traveling away from the program site.

11. Behave in a manner that is respectful of the rights and well-being of others, and encourage others to behave in a similar manner.
12. Accept responsibility for their own decisions and actions.

C. Recommendations to Parents/Guardians/Families

In Study Abroad as in other settings, parents, guardians, and families can play an important role in the health and safety of participants by helping them make decisions and by influencing their behavior overseas.

When appropriate, parents/guardians/families should:

1. Through their student participants, obtain and carefully evaluate health and safety information related to the program, as provided by Overseas Study and other sources.
2. Be involved in the decision of the participant to enroll in a particular program.
3. Engage the participant in a thorough discussion of safety and behavior issues, insurance needs, and emergency procedures related to living abroad.
4. Be responsive to requests from Overseas Study for information regarding the participant.
5. Keep in touch with the participant.
6. Be aware that some information may most appropriately be provided by the participant rather than the program.



Appendix C

HIV/AIDS & Traveler's Health

Description

AIDS is a serious disease, first recognized as a distinct syndrome in 1981. AIDS represents the late clinical stage of infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which progressively damages the immune system. Without an effective immune system, life-threatening infections and other noninfectious conditions related to failing immunity (such as certain cancers) eventually develop.

Occurrence

AIDS and HIV infection occur worldwide. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS estimates that, as of the end of 2005, nearly 40 million persons were living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. Although the most globally affected part of the world remains sub-Saharan Africa, in recent years, the steepest increases in HIV infection have occurred in Eastern Europe, Northern, Central, and East Asia. Many countries lack comprehensive surveillance systems, and despite improvements, the true number of cases is likely greater than officially reported, particularly in developing countries. Because HIV infection and AIDS are distributed globally, the risk for international travelers is determined less by geographic destination and more by behaviors that put them at risk for becoming infected, such as sexual and drug-using behaviors.

Risk for Travelers

The risk of HIV infection for international travelers is generally low. Factors to consider in assessing risk include the extent of direct contact with blood or other potentially infectious secretions and the extent of sexual contact with potentially infected persons. In addition, the blood supply in developing countries might not be adequately screened.

Prevention

No vaccine is available to prevent infection with HIV. Travelers should be advised that HIV infection is preventable. HIV can be transmitted through sexual intercourse and needle- or syringe-sharing; by medical use of blood, blood components, or organ or tissue transplantation; through artificial insemination; and perinatally from an infected woman to her infant. HIV is not transmitted through casual contact; air, food, or water routes; contact with inanimate objects; or by mosquitoes or other arthropod vectors. The use of any public conveyance (e.g., an airplane, an automobile, a boat, a bus, or a train) by persons with AIDS or HIV infection does not pose a risk of infection for the crew members or other travelers.

Travelers should be advised that they are at risk if they—

- Have sexual contact (heterosexual or homosexual) with an infected person.
- Use or allow the use of contaminated, unsterilized syringes or needles for any injections or other procedures that pierce the skin, including acupuncture, use of illicit drugs, steroid or vitamin injections, medical or dental procedures, ear or body piercing, or tattooing.
- Use infected blood, blood components, or clotting factor concentrates. HIV infection by this route is rare in countries or cities where donated blood and plasma are screened for antibodies to HIV.

Travelers should be advised to avoid sexual encounters with persons who are infected with HIV or whose HIV infection status is unknown. Travelers should also be advised to avoid sexual activity with persons who are at high risk for HIV infection, such as intravenous drug users, commercial sex workers (both male and female), and other persons with multiple sexual partners. In countries with high rates of HIV infection, many persons without these risk factors may be infected and be unaware of their status.

Condoms, when used consistently and correctly, prevent transmission of HIV. Travelers who engage in vaginal, anal, or oral-genital sexual contact with a person who is HIV-infected or whose HIV status is unknown should use a latex condom. Persons who are sensitive to latex should use condoms made of polyurethane or other synthetic materials. Some areas may have a limited supply and selection of condoms, or available condoms may be of inferior quality. Persons traveling to these areas who engage in sexual contact with persons who are HIV-infected or whose HIV status is unknown should carry their own supply of condoms. When a male condom cannot be used properly, a female condom should be considered. When no condom is available, travelers should abstain from anal, vaginal, and oral-genital sexual contact with persons who are HIV-infected or whose HIV status is unknown. Barrier methods other than condoms have not been shown to be effective in the prevention of HIV transmission. Spermicides alone have also not been shown to be effective, and the widely used spermicide nonoxynol-9 can increase the risk of HIV transmission.

In many countries, needle-sharing by intravenous drug users is a major means of HIV transmission and transmission of other infections, such as hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Travelers should be advised not to use drugs intravenously or share needles for any purpose. Travelers should also be advised to avoid, if at all possible, receiving medications from multidose vials, which may have become contaminated by used needles.

In many developed countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, western European nations, United States), the risk of transfusion-associated HIV infection has been virtually eliminated through required testing of all donated blood for antibody to HIV. In the United States, donations of blood and plasma must be screened for HIV-1 and HIV-2 antibodies, the HIV-1 p24 antigen, and traces of HIV genetic material that may indicate infection. Developing countries may have no formal program for testing blood or biological products for contamination with HIV. In those countries, travelers should (when medically prudent) avoid use of unscreened blood-clotting factor concentrates or concentrates of uncertain purity. If transfusion is necessary, the blood should be tested, if at all possible, for HIV antibody by appropriately trained laboratory technicians using a reliable test.

Needles used to draw blood or administer injections should be sterile, single use, disposable, and prepackaged in a sealed container. Travelers with insulin-dependent diabetes, hemophilia, or other conditions that necessitate routine or frequent injections should be advised to carry a supply of syringes, needles, and disinfectant swabs (e.g., alcohol wipes) sufficient to last their entire stay abroad. Before traveling, such persons should consider requesting documentation of the medical necessity for traveling with these items (e.g., a doctor's letter) in case their need is questioned by inspection personnel at ports of entry.

This information was obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Travelers Health Yellow Book (www.cdc.gov/travel/contentYellowBook.aspx).



**Helpful
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