

Student Travel Tips

The permission slips are signed, your bags are packed and you're, like, so ready to ditch the classroom and head out on your class trip. Travel is an exciting opportunity to experience different places and wondrous cultures, so the key is not to blow it by doing something that will ruin the trip for yourself and others.

While it's tempting to forget about all the rules as soon as your chaperones turn their backs, you should keep in mind these tips from the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA). Some of the most travel-wise people in the world, ASTA members know that studying for your upcoming trip is a homework assignment you'll actually enjoy.

Before You Go

Before you go, learn about the local laws and customs of the countries you're visiting, especially those concerning drinking age, drugs and curfews. You are not immune to a country's laws just because you're a visitor, and you can be arrested.

Bring an extra pair of glasses or contact lenses. It's hard to enjoy the sights when you can't see them.

Pack a simple first aid kit with bandages, antibiotic cream and pain relievers. It's a good thing to have "just in case." And tell your trip leaders about any medications you're taking.

Give your parents the phone and fax number of your hotel, the cell phone numbers of the chaperones and a full itinerary of your trip. If anything changes during the trip, e-mail your parents immediately with the new info.

Pack all valuables, medications, travel documents and passport in your carry-on bag. Occasionally checked luggage gets lost at airports, so you want to have your important items on you.

While You're There

Do not carry all your cash at once, especially if all you need is enough to buy lunch and a few sodas. And keep your wallet in a zippered pocket, preferably inside your jacket. If you need to exchange money in a foreign country, only use authorized vendors like banks.

Don't be flashy. Wear an old, inexpensive watch and leave the bling at home. You don't want to be a walking target for thieves. If you bring a fancy digital camera or an MP3 player, don't flaunt them.

When you check in at your hotel, grab a card from the counter with the hotel's name, address and phone number on it. Keep this card on you at all times.

Look both ways before crossing the streets. Yes, you've heard that a billion times, but you'll be surprised how easy it is to step into oncoming traffic in foreign countries, especially the ones where they drive on the other side of the road.

Travel with a buddy at all times and never wander off alone from the group.

Be respectful around, and ask permission before taking photographs of, churches, mosques, temples, synagogues and other religious sites. Also, ask permission before taking photographs of government buildings and military installations. In some countries you can be detained for taking a picture of the wrong building.

Talk to your trip leader or to a travel agent about types of food or beverages to avoid, and don't buy food from street vendors.

Class Dismissed

Going on an extended class trip may be the most fun you'll ever have while actually learning something. If you follow the rules above and stay out of trouble, the only memories you'll bring back are good ones.

For more information on your destination and additional tips for safe travel, visit ASTA at www.TravelSense.org and the Student & Youth Travel Association at www.SYTA.org. Enjoy your trip.