

# AURIMS Annual Conference - 25<sup>h</sup> & 26 May 2000

## Minimising risks in overseas travel

**Barry Blight, University Insurance Manager, La Trobe University**

Five American students were robbed and gang-raped while on an official university trip in Guatemala two years ago - the US State Department had advised against going to Guatemala, so what liabilities will that university face? They either knew or should have known of the advice to not go there.

According to the 1992 road death statistics per 100 million kilometres, the likelihood of death in Egypt is 40 times as high as countries such as UK, USA, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and other Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, France, Taiwan, Israel, New Zealand and Australia. In Kenya it is about 35 times, South Korea 30 times and South Africa 10 times the rate for the "good" countries. What advice do universities give to staff and students about the dangers of driving in these countries?

Do university insurance or risk managers know who is going where, and for how long? Staff go on conferences, outside studies programs, to seminars and on research. Students go on exchange programs, study abroad programs, in-country studies and other off shore and award programs as well as conferences and seminars.

Bearing in mind some of the desolate places that exist in the world where the travel dangers may be significantly higher than USA or Europe, what potentially dangerous destinations are attractive to academics involved in areas such as archaeology, anthropology, geology, linguistics and cultures, botany, zoology, historical studies or classical Greek and Hellenic studies?

Before students go overseas, do they get an induction? Is it compulsory? Are they warned about the dangers of food and drink and of mental health (including language, food, culture, lack of friends, studying, loneliness etc). If a problem occurs, will their parents say "Why did you let my Jack or Jill go? Didn't you evaluate the risks?". It is not enough to say "Go at your own risk" - that defence will be ineffective if there was no advice about what the risks were (because people need full information to enable them to properly evaluate the risks for themselves).

What information do international offices provide to students who are travelling overseas?

### **Dangerous cities**

What well known cities are on the list of the world's most dangerous cities, according to Control Risks (a UK based security organisation)?

- \* Port Moresby and Lae in Papua New Guinea
- \* Guatemala City
- \* Karachi

- \* Johannesburg
- \* and in Columbia - Bogota, Cali and Medellin.

What well known cities are included on the second tier (not dangerous, but certainly risky cities)? Phnom Penh, Rio De Janeiro, Jakarta, Nairobi, Mexico City, Detroit and New Orleans.

At the other end of the spectrum(very safe cities) is a raft of Arabian countries including United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Jordan, Egypt and Bahrain, as well as Berne in Switzerland, Dubrovnik in Croatia, Luxembourg City and Singapore.

### Specific dangers

What types of dangers are we looking at, and where? Control Risk rates cities from number 1 (very safe) to 7 (high crime levels and/or terrorism and guerilla violence demand extraordinary security precautions, Government unable to maintain law and order, and criminal gangs carry more authority than the Government). Currently, no city is on rating 7 but some of the cities on rating 6 are:

**Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea** - one of the world's most violent cities. Most crime by Raskol gangs (theft, holdups, muggings, rapes, drugs), often extreme violence is used. Female victims of robbery are often gang-raped. Women should not go outside on their own on foot, and no-one should walk outside at night.

**Lae** has severe law and order problems. A serious violent crime problem due to Raskol gangs. There are frequent robberies and murders in the Botanical Gardens and Mount Lunaman, even in daylight, and old Chinatown is not much better. The Police are generally corrupt and inefficient. The standard advice is "don't travel at night". Taxis are not reliable.

**Bogota, Colombia** - one of the most violent cities in the world. Armed theft by people posing as Police, and armed robbery and unlicensed taxis are particular problems. There is a real risk of kidnapping of foreigners at impromptu rebel road blocks.

While discussing Colombia, **Cali** is just as bad - Police frequently confiscate foreign currency to "verify its authenticity". In **Medellin**, also in Colombia, armed robbery and carjacking at gunpoint are commonplace.

**Lagos**, the commercial capital of Nigeria, is one of Africa's most dangerous cities. Armed robbers target foreign exchange bureaux at airports. The airport is notorious for poor security and direct flights from USA have been banned as the US Federal Aviation Authority safety standards have not been met. Many Police are corrupt and inefficient. State hospital facilities are poor.

**Kabul, Afghanistan** - the civil war means the city occasionally experiences rocket attacks. Most essential services such as electricity and water do not function. Kidnapping regularly

occurs and the international airport is regularly attacked.

**Brazzaville, Congo** - violent crime, particularly against foreigners and expatriates, is high. Police regularly stop vehicles and demand money. Soldiers are often responsible for armed crime. Police are generally corrupt and inefficient.

**Kinshasa, Congo** - civil war exists at present, but Kinshasa was dangerous before war broke out. Hostility towards foreigners, particularly US and UK citizens. Armed robbery common, CBD is unsafe. Many police and military personnel are corrupt and inefficient. Buses and trains are dangerous, uncomfortable and unsafe.

**Guatemala City** - high risk areas for violent crime include shops and public transport. Non-Latinos are at particular risk from armed car thieves and muggers.

**Port-au-Prince, Haiti** - high violent crime rates. Murders, carjackings, armed robberies and breakins with visitors at risk because of their comparative wealth.

**Karachi, Pakistan** - several US citizens shot. Numerous car thefts at gunpoint. Recommended to not walk or jog in parks, and avoid using taxis.

**Johannesburg, South Africa** - violent crime a serious problem in CBD. Carjacking, armed robbery and mugging common.

**Some of the well know cities on rating 5 on the “CityBrief” scale are:**

**Rio De Janeiro** - a dangerous city - **most** of the main business and tourist areas are **reasonably** safe during the **day**, **provided** sensible precautions are observed. Muggings occur everywhere, including the beaches and the theatre district.

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia** - All of the city should be considered potentially dangerous, although there is no obvious sense of danger. Armed robbers target tourists, business visitors and resident expatriates. Avoid the Police.

**San Salvador, El Salvador** - Armed holdups on airport road. Most of the city is unsafe after dark (don't drive after sunset). There are few people on the streets after 8pm and street lighting is turned off at 9pm. One of the highest per capita murder rates in the world. The city centre is one of the worst areas for crime.

**Jakarta, Indonesia** - Attacks on foreigners in taxis which have occurred since 1998 (including one death) appear to be arranged in collusion with the driver.

**Surabaya, Indonesia** - Foreigners at risk of robbery, assailants turn violent if resistance is offered. Police often attempt to solicit bribes.

**Baghdad, Iraq** - The city, is 800 kilometres from the airport (in Jordan), is subject to periodic US-led air strikes. Much of the population lives in poverty due to the war. Don't walk around the city at any time. Car hire is not safe and don't use public transport. If using a taxi, use a state-registered driver.

**Mombasa, Kenya** - Police are corrupt, underpaid and incompetent and often stop hire cars on flimsy pretexts, levying instant fines. Police are involved in some carjackings, frequently leaving victims in remote areas.

**Nairobi, Kenya** - Baggage handlers often steal from baggage. Frequent armed attacks on tourists by two or more assailants. Police often try to extract bribes from foreigners. About ten vehicles are stolen each day by armed carjackers. Don't hire rental vehicles (particularly 4 wheel drive) and don't use public transport.

**Mexico City, Mexico** - Don't walk after dark. Many police are inefficient and corrupt. Don't hail taxis on street and don't use green and white or yellow and white taxis (orange and white sitio taxis are regarded as safe). Crime rates are high.

**Tijuana, Mexico** - Crime rate is high (drugs are responsible for 70% of violent crime and 91% of murders). Business travellers may be kidnapped because of their relative wealth. Police are largely inefficient or corrupt or both.

**Lima, Peru** - Danger of robbery in taxis hailed on the street. The city centre is unsafe, even in business hours.

**Detroit, USA** - is recovering from a long period of economic blight, and has high incidence of street crime. Don't walk alone at night.

**New Orleans, USA** - The same as Detroit, plus avoid using Louis Armstrong Park at all times.

### **Information available**

What obligation do universities have to warn staff and students about dangers and risks when travelling to various overseas countries? The university insurance or risk manager may know a place is dangerous or risky, but can that information be effectively passed on to staff and students? What information should universities be providing to them? There are free Government services (Travel Warnings) as follows:

- \* Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade  
([www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice/index.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice/index.html))
- \* UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office ([www.fco.gov.uk/travel/countryadvice.asp](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel/countryadvice.asp))
- \* US State Department ([travel.state.gov/travel\\_warnings.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html))

The US State Department can automatically email any changes to their Travel Warnings or Consular Information sheets - these emails can be quite useful, because it is very difficult to maintain comprehensive knowledge about what is going on in all parts of the world.

However, one of the limitations of the three Government websites is that they provide information about countries, rather than cities, and the information is rather limited. Another potential problem is that the comments may be politicized - for example, how could a Government say "Don't go to xxxx" - it could do irreparable harm to their trade with that country.

Should staff and students be directed to these free websites? How would a university insurance or risk manager feel, knowing that they could have prevented those five American students who were raped, merely by suggesting they read those Travel Warnings before they went overseas? They could have prevented the psychological problems, the physical harm and the emotional trauma the students may have suffered. They may also have prevented the adverse publicity the university received in the media (which could have resulted in a drop of student enrolments).

#### **Travel website**

More information should be made available to those intending to travel overseas, so following a review of what was available from security organisations around the world (Kroll and Pinkertons in USA and Control Risks in UK) the La Trobe University website now includes a link to the Control Risks "CityBrief" website for an annual licence fee. The Insurance Office wanted to have an attractive website for intending travellers, so a lot of information relevant to travellers was included. All pages of the Insurance Office website attracted 6,000 hits in six weeks following the introduction of the new travel website, and has since rarely fallen below 1,000 hits per week. It saves many routine phone calls to the Insurance Office.

The travel website page includes a trip planning guide, and links to other websites providing

- \* Exchange rates
- \* World times
- \* Medical advisory service
- \* Visa information
- \* World maps

It also provides links to Lonely Planet, Fodors Travel Guide, & Rough Guides.

Should the policy wording be made available to those who are insured under it? Yes, otherwise it would be very difficult to deny liability for:-

- \* a theft, if the insured person didn't know the police had to be advised
- \* loss or damage to baggage, if the insured person didn't know the airline or hotel must be informed

- \* items purchased overseas (such as a pushbike, microwave or television) which cannot be regarded as “baggage”

### **Laptop safety**

A laptop should not be put in a suitcase, but included in the carry on luggage. Laptop carry cases that look like briefcases or handbags reduce the theft or “snatch and grab” risk. In some cases distractions occur when laptops are going through the airport x-ray equipment (frequently with the collusion of airport staff) resulting in laptop disappearance.

If a laptop has to be left in a vehicle, it should either be locked in the boot or hidden under the seat.

The information in the laptop should be backed up regularly, and the disk stored elsewhere.

### **Other sources of information**

The website for the Centre for Global Education of the University of Southern California ([www.usc.edu/globaled/safeti](http://www.usc.edu/globaled/safeti)) contains extensive travel information for students travelling overseas.

The SAFETI Clearing House (Safety Abroad First-Educational Travel Information) has produced the following in conjunction with the US Peace Corps :-

- \* Rape response handbook
- \* Crisis response handbook
- \* Pre-departure health training handbook (covering HIV, STD, malaria and other common health problems (including mental and emotional health), personal safety, water safety, food and water preparation).
- \* SAFETI program audit checklist

In addition, NAFSA ([www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org)), the Association of International Educators, has a Section on US Students Studying Abroad (SECUSSA). Their website also contains useful travel information ([www.nafsa.org/secussa](http://www.nafsa.org/secussa)).

### **Additional articles concerning risks for travellers**

“Important Safety Tips for Travellers”- safety on the plane, in the hotel, in the car and whilst travelling ([www.latrobe.edu.au/www/insurance/ins1](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/insurance/ins1))

“How to Survive a Hotel Fire” - risk management advice on minimising the exposure. ([www.latrobe.edu.au/www/insurance/ins4](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/insurance/ins4)).

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