

**St. Francis Xavier University  
International Travel and Safety  
Student Handbook**

February 2017

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## I. STFX POLICY ON INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND SAFETY OF STUDENTS

In the fall of 2016 the President's Council approved the [International Travel and Safety – Students](#) policy. This policy is intended to ensure that reasonable precautions are taken for the safety of StFX students who travel outside of Canada for University-related purposes. The policy outlines specific procedures students must follow to receive approval to travel abroad in association with a StFX sponsored activity.

The International Travel Assessment Committee (ITAC) was formed to support this policy.

Students planning to travel abroad must follow these procedures:

- a. Request approval to travel by completing the [Student International Travel Approval Form](#) (45 days prior to the relevant international travel activity). For students travelling in groups under the leadership of faculty, staff, or another student, that leader will submit the Student International Travel Approval Form on behalf of the group.
- b. The ITAC will review the information and respond to the applicant – granting permission to travel, denying travel, or asking for further information or change in itinerary before approval is granted.
- c. Once travel is approved, register through the [StFX International Travel Registry](#) (*no less than 30 days prior to travel*). Each individual student whose travel is approved will be required to enter their information in the ITAC Registry. This form provides information about the student themselves and their travel plans. This information is intended for when the University needs to support students who are abroad.
- d. Submit a travel itinerary. This itinerary should be emailed to the following address: [ITAC@stfx.ca](mailto:ITAC@stfx.ca)
- e. Ensure that they have sufficient travel medical insurance. This is insurance that covers costs for medical services abroad and for medical evacuation and emergency repatriation in the case of serious injury, acts of terrorism or natural disasters.
- f. Register with the [Government of Canada Registry of Canadians Abroad](#) (no less than 30 days prior to travel). The Canadian Government offers this service for Canadians, so they can contact travelers in the case of an emergency or if a public event occurs that threatens individual safety.
- g. Monitor *the* [Government of Canada Travel Advisory website](#) for safe travel in the destination locale before and during travel. If there is a change in the Travel Advisory at any point in the student's journey, please notify [ITAC@stfx.ca](mailto:ITAC@stfx.ca). If the risk warning moves into Level 3 "High – avoid all essential travel" or a level 4 "Extreme – avoid all travel",

ITAC will notify the student of any changes in approval or requirement to return to Canada.

## **II. GOVERNMENT OF CANADA TRAVEL ADVISORY RISK LEVELS**

The [Government of Canada Travel Advisory Risk Levels](#) play a major role in the assessment of risk for any specific travel event. This system identifies 4 risk levels.

StFX uses these risk levels to assess risk for students traveling abroad. In general, students will not be approved to travel to areas deemed to be at level 3 or 4.

**Level 1 – LOW:** People should exercise normal security precautions. (There are no significant security concerns)

**Level 2 – MEDIUM:** People should exercise a high degree of caution. (There are identifiable security concerns in the country or in specific regions. Travelers should be alert and vigilant to their surroundings)

**Level 3 – HIGH:** Avoid non-essential travel. There are specific security concerns in the country or in specific regions. Travelers should reconsider their need to travel at this time.

**Level 4 – EXTREME:** Avoid all travel (there is an extreme risk to personal safety and travel should not be planned for this country at that time. Non-residents should leave, should it be safe to do so.

As circumstances relating to safety in any specific region can change quickly, these levels can also change. Students must be aware that if they are in a foreign country and the Government of Canada risk level in their community rises to either Level 3 or Level 4, the student may be asked to withdraw from that country. StFX Office of Internationalization will assist the students in making any necessary travel plans. If the student incurs costs, they will be charged first to the traveler's insurance policy, and any costs not covered by the insurance policy will be reimbursed by StFX.

## **III. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY: MINIMIZING RISK AND MAXIMIZING SAFETY**

Once a student travel activity has been approved by ITAC, the main responsibility for minimizing personal risk and maximizing safety is on the shoulders of the student. The student must keep this in mind throughout the preparation for travel and during the travel experience.

### **III.a BEFORE YOU TRAVEL**

#### **BECOME INFORMED**

When travelling abroad you are likely to be spending your time in an unfamiliar cultural context. If you are traveling to a country where the native language is not English, you may be more vulnerable because you don't understand the local language. You may not be aware of differences in gender attitudes or possible challenges to your personal safety in a location. Such examples emphasize the importance of finding out as much as you can about the country you are traveling to and the location where you will spend most of your time. The more you know about the history, culture, politics, and geography of the region, the more aware you will be about the any safety related challenges where you will be living. This will help you make good judgments about your own personal safety while in that setting.

The [Canadian Government travel advisories](#) are extremely helpful in presenting concise information on the following topics for each country:

- Risk Levels
- Safety and Security
- Entry and Exit Requirements
- Health Considerations
- The laws and culture of the country
- Climate and natural disaster information
- How to get assistance when in that country.

Each country advisory gives specific information relevant to your destination. They are also helpful because you may be visiting several countries during your time abroad. You can refer to this information when you are taking shorter trips away from your home location.

#### **HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS**

Find out about possible diseases that could be contracted in the country you are visiting. Then take steps to be protected against contracting any of these diseases. The Public Health Agency of Canada has information for travelers relating to [Health and Safety](#) on their website.

Many communities in Canada have officially designated [Travel Health clinics](#). At these clinics, travelers are advised about health risks in the host country and procedures to mitigate that risk, such as immunizations or medicines which can be purchased before travel.

The [International Travel Health Clinic in Antigonish](#) is located in the Mediplex Building, 40 Church Street, Antigonish, Phone: (902) 863-4558, Ext 1.

Students can also visit the StFX Health Centre, Bloomfield Centre, Phone: (902) 867-2263, for general information, however the StFX Health Centre does not do immunizations.

If you are already taking prescription medication, share this information with the doctor advising you. Ask your pharmacist whether any of the regular medications you take are available in your host country, and whether your prescriptions may be filled (before you leave) with a dosage that lasts longer than normally would be the case if you are at home. Find out if there are alternative medicines that could substitute if the product you use is not available.

If you have any allergies ensure that you are carrying any medication you will need to counteract an allergic reaction. Let someone close to you in your host country know where the medication is and how it must be administered in case you are unable to administer it yourself (e.g., Epi-pen).

All travelers with significant on-going health problems or allergies should wear a Medic Alert I.D.

Be aware some travel destinations may have lower standards of care in medical facilities than what is expected in Canada, as well as scarcity and remoteness of emergency vehicles, pharmacies, and hospitals. Before you travel, carefully consider your current medical conditions, injuries or disabilities which may have an impact on your mobility or other aspects of your travel experience.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTS**

Leave copies of important documents with a family member or friend at home. These should include ID information, your passport picture page, your health card, your driver's license, and your credit/debit cards, in case these get lost or stolen. It is much easier to replace them if you have a record of card numbers and other information. You should know how to quickly contact card providers should debit or credit cards need to be cancelled.

Some other suggestions to make your life easier while travelling:

- Make sure your passport does not expire more than 6 months after your expected return date to Canada. If immigration authorities believe the passport will expire when you are travelling, this may affect your access to that country.

- Each country has different regulations for documents required to enter that country, such as visitors' visas, student visas, or work visas. Make sure you leave lots of time for a visa application to be processed so that you will be able to leave Canada when you plan to do so.
- When you leave Canada, be sure to bring with you any documents that demonstrate your purpose in visiting that country. These may be documents from a community organization, a university, a conference registration, research associates or other similar types of hosts.
- Often for entry visas or study permits, the applicant is asked to provide financial information guaranteeing ability to pay for accommodations and other expenses while abroad. This should be from a formal banking institution on letterhead and signed by an official with that institution.
- Bring along, or know how to access forms for health insurance claims. You will likely need the care provider to sign documents for you to recover the cost from your insurance company. Most insurance providers expect you to pay for the service up front and then submit a claim to the insurance company afterwards.
- Contact cards for emergency situations in your host country can be created using a [template](#) at the Government of Canada website.

### PRE-TRAVEL CHECKLIST

- Read the StFX University [Risk Management Policy](#)
- Apply for and receive [approval and register](#) your trip abroad with StFX.
- Send your travel itinerary to [itac@stfx.ca](mailto:itac@stfx.ca).
- Register with the Government of Canada Registry of Canadians Travelling Abroad found at <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/registration>.
- Learn about the customs and norms of your destination country and region. The Canadian government [Travel Advisories](#) are a good start.

- Check [Travel Health notices](#) when you begin your planning and just before you leave home.
- Visit your health professional to determine if immunizations are needed.
- Contact your medical insurance provider for: 1) instructions on how to proceed in a medical emergency. 2) How they will assist you should a medical emergency occur. 3) How to submit a claim for reimbursement for a medical expense. 4) Ensure that you have sufficient insurance to cover you, including health and repatriation insurance.
- Identify how to arrange assistance when a serious incident occurs while you are traveling or living abroad.
  - At the local site
  - Canadian Government offices which can assist and [how they can help](#)
  - StFX University officials who can assist (Notify the contact person in your program, department, or school). Notify [ITAC@stfx.ca](mailto:ITAC@stfx.ca). If needed, you can call the StFX University 24-hour security office 902-867-4444 or [security@stfx.ca](mailto:security@stfx.ca).
- Educate yourself about common risks by visiting the Government of Canada [Travel Advisory](#) sites. These have information about: in country travel, culturally acceptable behavior, and legal restrictions in countries around the world.
- When you are packing:
  - Bring along appropriate dress for the destination and the activities you are engaged in.
  - If you are travelling as part of a university program, check with that program for proper dress.
  - Do not take expensive personal items. If there's something that you value highly, it is best to leave it safely at home.
  - Take medications (in original packaging and with prescription information) that would be difficult to get abroad. This includes non-prescription medication. Remember that the allergy season will be different abroad.
  - A photocopy of documents should be left at home should you need to have them replaced.

### **IIIb. WHEN YOU TRAVEL**

With international travel comes the freedom to choose from a variety of new social, educational, and potentially adventurous experiences. Your choices must consider the

risks involved and possible negative outcomes. Does the natural environment pose any risks? Will you be breaking any local laws? Are you exposing yourself to personal danger? To reduce any potential harm, consider the following:

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY**

- Pay attention to weather reports, news of what is happening in your region and heed public warnings on how to respond to a potential natural disaster.
- Don't take on outdoor challenges if you don't have the skills and experience. Try something new at a level that is suitable to you. Heed safety warnings on trails and at tourist sites.
- Not every part of a city or country is safe. Research your destination and your route before you set out [Country advisories](#). If there is a regional advisory at Levels 3 or 4 on the Canadian Government travel advisory website, travel to that location is prohibited for safety reasons.
- Ask your onsite host, hotel operator, or other travelers, about any safety issues associated with a chosen destination.

### **LEGAL SAFETY**

- Educate yourself about issues relating to the law in the country where you will be living or travelling. If you are arrested for breaking a law in another country, ignorance of the law will not be a successful defense. Not all countries guarantee the same freedoms as in Canada. For example, there are many countries where [homosexuality is considered a crime](#).
- Things to consider are: laws and legal ages relating to alcohol and drug use, punishment for crimes, how the legal system works, how to respond should you be confronted by police or accused of breaking the law, and what rights an accused has for representation.
- Contact the nearest [Canadian consular affairs office](#) should you have any legal problems.

## PERSONAL SAFETY

- When you first arrive at your destination, if you have a host organization or institution, ask for a contact name, email, and phone number in the case of a personal emergency.
- Research short trips outside your host region and pay attention to travel warnings.
- Let friends know when you are leaving town, your itinerary and when you will return.
- You want to meet new people and be friendly. This however can make you vulnerable. Being friendly is okay but sharing too much about yourself to a casual acquaintance, may be giving away information that could be used against you.
- Depending on the situation and location, dress conservatively so as not to offend local customs and to avoid drawing attention to yourself.
- Be aware of your surroundings and try not to stand out in a crowd.
- Don't party alone. If you are easily identified as a foreigner, and if you are obviously travelling solo, you may be easy prey for someone looking to take advantage.
- Be pickpocket smart. Avoid giving hints about where your valuables are on your person.
- Carry small change or small bills to avoid taking out your wallet for minor transactions.
- Don't depend on your debit or credit card all the time. Always have some cash handy if your cards don't work and you need to use cash to get home.
- Hide some cash somewhere else on your person, in case you lose your wallet.
- Don't leave bags or valuables in plain sight in a car. It is very common for cars to be broken into for valuables especially when they can be seen.
- Carry the telephone number of a reputable taxi company. Ask about what are the recommended companies for visitors in the area.

- Find out what the public emergency calling number is for your location. In other countries, the “911” is not likely to be the emergency calling number. For a list of these visit [https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/students-abroad/pdfs/911\\_ABROAD.pdf](https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/students-abroad/pdfs/911_ABROAD.pdf)

### **IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME....**

There are some recreational activities that appeal to the adventurer in us, but involve an undue amount of risk. Either there is a higher likelihood that you expose yourself physical harm, or you are making yourself vulnerable to someone taking advantage of you. These are the types of activities that are not usually covered by travel medical insurance and are often referred to as extreme sports or self-endangerment.

In some cases, any medical costs associated with injury would become the responsibility of the student. Some examples are:

- Bungee Jumping
- Sky-diving
- Hitch-hiking
- Partying with strangers
- Too many drinks
- Illegal drugs
- Joining a local protest

Because of the potential threat to personal safety, StFX does not condone activities such as the one’s above, considering them to be counter to the intent of the current StFX Policy on International Travel and Safety of Students.

### **WHEN YOU ARRIVE CHECKLIST**

When you arrive, think ahead about possible threats to your safety. Think about potential emergencies and consider a safe response. For answers to your questions, talk to any representative associated with your experience abroad, such as a group leader, on site staff or a local contact.

- Learn about local culture, customs, and laws**

- Dress appropriately for the location.
- Find out what is suitable in terms of exercising outdoors and in public spaces.
- Be aware that some topics may be controversial. Consider avoiding unnecessary conversations, that could cause friction between you and locals.
- Find out if it's legal or appropriate to take photos of strangers, monuments, government or military buildings or holy sites.
- [Research](#) local laws.
- Ask your host, hotel operator or other knowledgeable person what areas of the city or region are to be avoided by non-locals.
- Be responsible about the messages you put out on social media (your posts may be read by your hosts or local authorities).

**Pay attention to your surroundings and use good judgment. Consider how to remove yourself from any danger. Identify escape routes, such as:**

- Exits from your residence, public buildings, or from public transportation (e.g. trains, subway stations).
- Safe public spaces, where you usually travel, and where you could ask for assistance.
- Check to see if your home, residence, or room has a working smoke detector; this is not common practice in all countries.
- Make sure your home door and windows locks work, and use the locks.
- Plan any personal vehicle travel in advance to avoid any problems when travelling on major highways, smaller roads, or city streets.

**Program important telephone numbers into your phone address book, such as:**

- A group leader
- Local friends who can help you negotiate a problem
- Institutional representatives (such as international coordinators at a host university)
- Local police, ambulance, and fire services, [the local emergency '911' services number](#).
- Canadian [embassy or consular services](#) closest to your place of residence
- Canadian government [emergency assistance](#) for travelers abroad.
- Send your phone number in your travel location to [ITAC@stfx.ca](mailto:ITAC@stfx.ca) (should the university need to contact you in the case of an in-country emergency).

**Know how to respond in the case of an emergency**

For a situation that does not require medical assistance:

- Seek out shelter from any danger and immediately leave the scene of a serious incident.
- Contact the local [Canadian consulate or embassy](#) to let them know you are safe.
- If you experience any major emergency you should contact [ITAC@stfx.ca](mailto:ITAC@stfx.ca) or 902-867-5197. You can also call the StFX 24-hour security office 902-867-4444 or [security@stfx.ca](mailto:security@stfx.ca) .

- Contact the nearest Canadian [embassy or consular service](#).

For a situation that requires emergency medical assistance:

- Contact your medical travel insurance provider to report your situation and seek guidance.
- Seek medical treatment at the closest medical facility, or the facility recommended by your insurance provider.
- Notify local and at-home program staff right away ([ITAC@stfx.ca](mailto:ITAC@stfx.ca)).
- Contact the nearest Canadian [embassy or consular service](#) if you need their assistance.
- Canadian consular services abroad [can assist in the following ways](#):
  - Supplying names of local doctors and health facilities
  - Visiting you in the hospital and providing basic translation services
  - Arranging for medical evacuation, if you require treatment which is not available in the region. (The costs for this service will not be covered by the government, but may be covered by travel insurance)
- Complete the StFX International Travel Incident Report Form available at <https://www.stfx.ca/international/international-travel-including-students>.

**Reduce the possibility of being a victim of theft**

- Use a reputable company or bank to exchange money.
- Withdraw money from bank machines during the daytime and in highly visible locations.
- Keep only the cash you need for the day in your purse or wallet.
- If you must carry larger sums of cash, split this up on your person.
- Use a money belt (hidden from view) and don't reach into your money belt in public.

**Practice transportation safety**

- Share a copy of your itinerary with family or a friend.
- Travel only in locally licensed and authorized taxis.
- Try to agree upon an approximate cost for the taxi ride before getting in the vehicle.
- Ask a local how much a trip should cost before engaging a taxi.
- Don't get into a taxi with another person already in it.
- Get any luggage from the trunk before paying a taxi driver.
- Always wear a seatbelt.
- If a driver is driving too fast or recklessly, request that the driver slow down or end the ride.

**Avoid participating in protests and demonstrations (foreigners are not protected from violence or arrest if you are thought to be actively involved)**

Should you unexpectedly be caught up in civil unrest:

- Stay far from the center of activity.

- Do not document the event with your phone or camera. There may be risks of documenting a protest based on local laws.
- **Know how to respond, should you be arrested in a foreign country.**
  - Ask the detaining authorities to notify the nearest Canadian Embassy. Canadian authorities can [assist in a variety of ways](#).
  - Do not admit to wrongdoing or sign anything before having legal representation.
- **For members of the LGBTQ community, become aware of laws and attitudes in your host country.**
  - Remember you are subject to the laws and the justice system where you travel. Find out what [LGBTQ rights are in the country you are travelling in](#).
  - Discretion about your LGBTQ status is wise. People in many countries may not share liberal ideas about LGBTQ rights.
  - Avoid excessive physical displays of affection in public.
  - Be wary of new-found “friends.” Watch out for entrapment campaigns.
  - Not all countries recognize same sex marriage and traveling as a married couple [may be problematic](#).
  - Other [specific suggestions](#) relating to safe travel for members of the LGBTQ community.
- **Continue to monitor the [Travel Advisories](#) of the Canadian government for any countries you plan to travel to while you are abroad.**

#### IV. Canadian Government Services Abroad

The Canadian government representation (High Commission, Embassy, Consulate) nearest to you is your first point of contact for direct assistance. Instructions on how to request emergency assistance from Canadian representatives abroad can be found at <http://travel.gc.ca/assistance/emergency-assistance>.

##### Email:

- [sos@international.gc.ca](mailto:sos@international.gc.ca)
- [Emergency contact form](#)

##### Telephone from outside Canada

- Call the [nearest embassy or consulate](#).  
SOS Emergency: +1 613 996 8885 (call collect where available)
- [Toll-free numbers](#) in some countries

## **V. When You Return**

If you encountered any problems during your travel, please notify the StFX International Office ([itac@stfx.ca](mailto:itac@stfx.ca) or 902-867-5197). We are available to assist you. Submit a StFX International Travel Incident Report Form available at <https://www.stfx.ca/international/international-travel-including-students>.

If you experienced any health problems while you were travelling or upon your return, please discuss this with your physician or health care provider. If you were travelling as part of a group, please notify the group leader. In this way, the leader can determine if your illness was individual or part of a group concern that needs to be addressed.