



# South America - Safety Travel Guidelines

## Notes from: A SAFE TRIP ABROAD

When you travel abroad, the odds are in your favor that you will have a safe and incident-free trip. However, crime and violence, as well as unexpected difficulties, do happen to U.S. citizens in all parts of the world. In the hope of helping you avoid serious difficulties during your abroad, we have compiled safety guidelines from the U.S. Department and the Chile and Brazil Consular Information Sheets.

### General travel information:

#### BEFORE YOU GO

##### *What to Bring*

Safety begins when you pack. To avoid being a target, dress conservatively. Don't wear expensive looking jewelry. A flashy wardrobe or one that is too casual can mark you as a tourist. As much as possible, avoid the appearance of affluence. **It's also a good idea not to wear anything that clearly marks you as American or a tourist. No brand new jeans and white tennis shoes.**

Always try to travel light. You can move more quickly and will be more likely to have a free hand. You will also be less tired and less likely to set your luggage down, leaving it unattended.

Carry the minimum amount of valuables necessary for your trip and plan a place or places to conceal them. Your passport, cash and credit cards are most secure when locked in a hotel safe. When you have to carry them on your person, you may wish to conceal them in several places rather than putting them all in one wallet or pouch. Avoid handbags, back packs and outside pockets that are easy targets for thieves. Inside pockets and a sturdy shoulder bag with the strap worn across your chest are somewhat safer. One of the safest places to carry valuables is in a pouch or money belt worn under your clothing.

If you wear glasses, pack an extra pair. Bring them and any medicines you need in your carry-on luggage. **To avoid problems when passing through customs, keep medicines in their original, labeled containers. Bring copies of your prescriptions and the generic names for the drugs. If a medication is unusual or contains narcotics, carry a letter from your doctor attesting to your need to take the drug. If you have any doubt about the legality of carrying a certain drug into a country, consult the embassy or consulate of that country first.**

Bring a small amount of cash or travelers' checks and only two major credit cards with low credit limits. **You do not want to bring a credit card that has a high credit limit.**

Pack an extra set of passport photos along with a photocopy of your passport information page to make replacement of your passport easier in the event it is lost or stolen.

Consider getting a telephone calling card. It is a convenient way of keeping in touch. If you have one, verify that you can use it from your overseas location(s). Access numbers to U.S. operators are published in many international newspapers. Find out your access number before you go.

## ***What to Leave Behind***

Don't bring anything you would hate to lose. Leave at home:

- valuable or expensive-looking jewelry,
- irreplaceable family objects,
- all unnecessary credit cards, especially one with high credit limits,
- Social Security card, library cards, and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet.

Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home in case they need to contact you in an emergency.

## ***A Few Things to Bring AND Leave Behind***

Make two photocopies of your passport identification page, airline tickets, driver's license and the credit cards that you plan to bring with you. Leave one photocopy of this data with family or friends at home; pack the other in a place separate from where you carry your valuables. Leave a copy of the serial numbers of your travelers' checks with a friend or relative at home. Carry your copy with you in a separate place and, as you cash the checks, cross them off the list. **Also, leave a copy of contact numbers for Global Tracks in case your family needs to get in touch with you while you are gone.**

## ***Local Laws and Customs***

When you leave the United States, you are subject to the laws of the country where you are. Therefore, before you go, learn as much as you can about the local laws and customs of the places you plan to visit. Good resources are your library, your travel agent, and the embassies, consulates or tourist bureaus of the countries you will visit. In addition, keep track of what is being reported in the media about recent developments in those countries.

## ***Legal Documents***

Have your affairs at home in order. If you leave a current will, insurance documents, and power of attorney with your family or a friend, you can feel secure about traveling and will be prepared for any emergency that may arise while you are away. If you have minor children, consider making guardianship arrangements for them.

## ***Credit***

Make a note of the credit limit on each credit card that you bring. Make certain not to charge over that amount on your trip. In some countries, Americans have been arrested for innocently exceeding their credit limit. Ask your credit card company how to report the loss of your card from abroad. 800 numbers do not work from abroad, but your company should have a number that you can call while you are overseas. **Inform them that you will be traveling in Chile and Brazil January 6-15, 2007 so charges you make there will not be red flagged for concern or denied.**

## ***Insurance***

Find out if your personal property insurance covers you for loss or theft abroad. More importantly, check on whether your health insurance covers you abroad. Medicare and Medicaid do not provide payment for medical care outside the U.S. Even if your health insurance will reimburse you for medical care that you pay for abroad, normal health insurance does not pay for medical evacuation from a remote area or from a country where medical facilities are inadequate. Consider purchasing one of the short-term health and emergency assistance policies designed for travelers. Also, make sure that the plan you purchase includes medical evacuation in the event of an accident or serious illness.

## **PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE WHILE TRAVELING**

### ***Safety on the Street***

Use the same common sense traveling overseas that you would at home. Be especially cautious in or avoid areas where you are likely to be victimized. These include crowded subways, train stations, elevators, tourist sites, market places, festivals and marginal areas of cities. Don't use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly-lit streets. **Try not to travel alone at night.** Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances. Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments. Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers. Avoid scam artists. Beware of strangers who approach you, offering bargains or to be your guide.

Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will:

- jostle you
- ask you for directions or the time
- point to something spilled on your clothing
- or distract you by creating a disturbance.

A child or even a woman carrying a baby can be a pickpocket. Beware of groups of vagrant children who create a distraction while picking your pocket.

Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers. Try to seem purposeful when you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. When possible, ask directions only from individuals in authority. Know how to use a pay telephone and have the proper change or token on hand.

Learn a few phrases in the local language so you can signal your need for help, the police, or a doctor. Make a note of emergency telephone numbers you may need: police, fire, your hotel, and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. If you are confronted, don't fight back. Give up your valuables. Your money and passport can be replaced, but you cannot.

### ***Safety in Your Hotel***

Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby. Do not leave money and other valuables in your hotel room while you are out. Use the hotel safe. Let someone know when you expect to return if you are out late at night. If you are alone, do not get on an elevator if there is a suspicious-looking person inside. Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room. Know how to report a fire. Be sure you know where the nearest fire exits and alternate exits are located. Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit. This could be a life saver if you have to crawl through a smoke-filled corridor.

### ***How to Handle Money Safely***

Do not flash large amounts of money when paying a bill. Make sure your credit card is returned to you after each transaction.

Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money, buy airline tickets or purchase souvenirs. Do not change money on the black market.

If your possessions are lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the local police. Keep a copy of the police report for insurance claims and as an explanation of your plight. After reporting missing items to the police, report the loss or theft of:

- travelers' checks to the nearest agent of the issuing company,
- credit cards to the issuing company,
- airline tickets to the airline or travel agent,
- passport to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

## ***How to Avoid Legal Difficulties***

When you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws and are under its jurisdiction **NOT** the protection of the U.S. Constitution. You can be arrested overseas for actions that may be either legal or considered minor infractions in the United States. Be aware of what is considered criminal in the country where you are. Consular Information Sheets include information on unusual patterns of arrests in various countries when appropriate. Some of the offenses for which U.S. citizens have been arrested abroad are:

### ***Drug Violations***

More than 1/3 of U.S. citizens incarcerated abroad are held on drug charges. Some countries do not distinguish between possession and trafficking. Many countries have mandatory sentences - even for possession of a small amount of marijuana or cocaine. A number of Americans have been arrested for possessing prescription drugs, particularly tranquilizers and amphetamines that they purchased legally in certain Asian countries and then brought to some countries in the Middle East where they are illegal. Other U.S. citizens have been arrested for purchasing prescription drugs abroad in quantities that local authorities suspected were for commercial use. If in doubt about foreign drug laws, ask local authorities or the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

### ***Photography***

In many countries you can be harassed or detained for photographing such things as police and military installations, government buildings, border areas and transportation facilities. If you are in doubt, ask permission before taking photographs.

### ***Purchasing Antiques***

Americans have been arrested for purchasing souvenirs that were, or looked like, antiques and which local customs authorities believed were national treasures. This is especially true in Turkey, Egypt and Mexico. In countries where antiques are important, document your purchases as reproductions if that is the case, or if they are authentic, secure the necessary export permit (usually from the national museum.)

### ***Terrorism***

Terrorist acts occur at random and unpredictably, making it impossible to protect yourself absolutely. The first and best protection is to avoid travel to unsafe areas where there has been a persistent record of terrorist attacks or kidnapping. The vast majority of foreign states have good records of maintaining public order and protecting residents and visitors within their borders from terrorism.

Most terrorist attacks are the result of long and careful planning. Just as a car thief will first be attracted to an unlocked car with the key in the ignition, terrorists are looking for defenseless, easily accessible targets that follow predictable patterns. The chances that a tourist, traveling with an unpublished program or itinerary, would be the victim of terrorism are slight. In addition, many terrorist groups, seeking publicity for political causes within their own country or region, may not be looking for American targets.

Nevertheless, the following pointers may help you avoid becoming a target of opportunity. They should be considered as adjuncts to the tips listed in the previous sections on how to protect yourself against the far greater likelihood of being a victim of crime. These precautions may provide some degree of protection, and can serve as practical and psychological deterrents to would-be terrorists.

- Be aware of what you discuss with strangers or what may be overheard by others.
- Try to minimize the time spent in the public area of an airport, which is a less protected area. Move quickly from the check-in counter to the secured areas. On arrival, leave the airport as soon as possible.
- As much as possible avoid dress and behavior that may identify you as an American.
- Keep an eye out for suspicious abandoned packages or briefcases. Report them to airport security or other authorities and leave the area promptly.
- Avoid obvious terrorist targets such as places where Americans and Westerners are known to congregate.

## **Travel and Safety information for Santiago, Chile**

### ***Arrival and Entry Formalities***

All travelers are required to have in their possession a valid passport for entrance into Chile. Travelers holding a United States passport do not require a special entry visa. Non-USA citizens are advised to check with the nearest Chilean diplomatic or consular representation for information on visa requirements

USA citizens traveling on tourism or on business trips are allowed to enter Chile without a visa for a period of 90 days. All US citizens must pay a US\$ 100.00 reciprocity fee in cash at the immigration booth at the airport. This fee is paid only once and it is valid until the expiration of the passport.

### ***Safety***

Santiago and most Chilean cities are fairly safe. As in any city however, caution is always recommended, especially at night. It is not advisable to let strangers approach you, or wear expensive jewelry. Keep valuables out of sight and be alert to pickpockets on the Metro. In restaurants and cafes, especially on the street, never leave your valuables unattended or your handbag hanging behind your chair.

Valuables, including your passport, should be deposited in the safe in your hotel room. **Do not carry your passport with you daily.** We suggest you bring a photocopy of the photo page of your passport to carry with you at all times in case local authorities request to see them. In the event of theft you should immediately contact your hotel. This applies to Brazil as well.

Chilean Police are honest, helpful and friendly. Under no circumstances should you attempt to bribe a Chilean Police officer, which is considered highly offensive to their professional integrity and will result in a trip to the local jail.

### ***Transportation***

For transportation not included in the schedule, you may ask the hotel concierge to arrange for a taxi service. Flagging taxis on the street is generally safe and reliable in Chile. Santiago's subway system (known locally as the "Metro") is a remarkably clean and safe way to travel, although it reaches only limited parts of the city.

### ***Language***

Spanish is the official language of Chile. Many Chileans enjoy the opportunity of speaking English when approached by non-Spanish speaking visitors, but is not commonly spoken on the street.

### ***Local Money***

Chile's official currency is the Peso. Most internationally recognized currencies can be exchanged at commercial banks and foreign exchange agencies. Credit cards are accepted in most hotels, restaurants and major shops. Banks are open from Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 14:00 hrs. ATMs are available in Santiago for money withdrawal for the following cards: Cirrus, Visa, Plus, Maestro, among others.

### ***Cell Phones***

Triband GSM cell phones are able to roam within the Entel PSC GSM Network using the same mobile number. Compatible SIM cards can be purchased upon arrival. The GSM Frequency used by Entel PCS is 1900 MHz.

### ***Electric Supply***

The power supply in Chile is 220 Volts @ 50 Hz.

### ***Goods and Services Tax***

Goods and services in Chile are subject to a 19% value added tax. This is included in the prices at restaurants and stores and, if not, it is clearly stated. This tax cannot be claimed back when leaving the country.

### ***Gratuity***

It is usual to tip at restaurants and bars in Chile. The standard rate is 10% and this is generally not included in the bill unless otherwise stated. It is not necessary to tip taxi drivers.

### ***Climate***

Santiago has a pleasant Mediterranean climate. In mid January the weather is warm during day and cool in the evening. Daily temperatures range from an average minimum of 54° rising to an average high of 85° in the afternoon, cooling down again at night.

Embassy and Consulate of United States of America  
Av. Andrés Bello 2800, Las Condes, Santiago, Casilla 27-D

### ***Embassy***

Telephone: +56 (2) 232-2600  
Ambassador: Craig A. Kelly

### ***Consulate***

Telephone: +56 (2) 335-6550  
Consulate General: Sean Murphy

## **Travel and Safety information for Sao Paulo and Rio, Brazil**

### ***Arrival and entry***

A passport and visa are required for U.S. citizens traveling to Brazil for any purpose. Brazilian visas must be obtained in advance from the Brazilian Embassy or consulate nearest to the traveler's place of residence. There are no "airport visas" and immigration authorities will refuse entry to Brazil to anyone not possessing a valid visa. All Brazilian visas, regardless of the length of validity, must initially be used within 90 days of the issuance date or will no longer be valid. Immigration authorities will not allow entry into Brazil without a valid visa. The U.S. Government cannot assist travelers who arrive in Brazil without proper documentation.

### ***Language***

The spoken language in Brazil is Portuguese, however Spanish and English are also widely used in the cities.

### ***Local Money***

The currency used in Brazil is called the Real (R\$) and the foreign exchange rate is published daily in the newspapers and other specialized sites. Foreign exchange can be handled in banks, travel agencies and authorized hotels. Travelers' checks as well as currencies are easily exchanged at these locations. International credit cards are accepted at most hotels, restaurants, stores, travel agencies, car rental companies and other companies that render services to tourists. A floating exchange rate is used.

### ***Electrical Supply***

Brazil has a variety of electrical voltages, sometimes within the same city, the better hotels offer 220 volts. If not, transformers are available in electrical stores. Outlets often accept a variety of plug types but the two-pin type is standard.

### ***Gratuity***

Most restaurants also add 10% or more to the total of the bill, but must make it clear that they have done so; waiters appreciate another 5% if their service has been good. Brazilians don't normally tip taxi drivers, except if they handle bags, although they may round up the total. Hotel staff expects small tips and most services expect 10-15%.

### ***Cell Phones***

GSM 900 and 1800 cell phone networks cover the main cities, and phones are available to rent. Internet cafes are widely available.

### ***Safety in Sao Paulo***

While similar incidents may occur elsewhere, all areas of Sao Paulo have a high rate of armed robbery of pedestrians at stoplights. There is a particularly high incidence of robberies and pick pocketing in the Praca da Se section of Sao Paulo and in the eastern part of the city. As is true of "red light districts" in other cities, the areas of Sao Paulo on Rua Augusta north of Avenida Paulista and the Estacao de Luz metro area are especially dangerous. The number one item of choice by robbers in Sao Paulo, especially with regards to business travelers, is laptop computers.

### ***Safety in Rio***

The city continues to experience a high incidence of crime. Tourists are particularly vulnerable to street thefts and robberies on and in areas adjacent to major tourist attractions and the main beaches in the city. Walking on the beaches is very dangerous at night. During the day, travelers are advised not to take possessions of value to the beach. In Rio de Janeiro City, motorists are allowed to treat stoplights as stop signs between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. to protect against holdups at intersections.

### ***Embassy ~ Brasilia***

Telephone: +55 (61) 3312-7000  
Ambassador: Clifford M. Sobel

### ***Consulate ~ Sao Paulo***

Telephone: +55 (11) 5186-7000  
Consul General: Christopher McMullen

### ***Consulate ~ Rio***

Telephone: +55 (21) 3823-2000  
Consul General: Elizabeth Lee Martinez