

# Fire Safety for International Travelers

## Tips for Students, Staff and Faculty Going Abroad

Whether you are a student, program director or faculty member going abroad, you may find that fire safety overseas differs markedly from what we are accustomed to here in the U.S. Fire safety equipment, i.e. fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems and fire alarms commonly found in this country, may be inoperable or non-existent in many parts of the world. Many countries have fire safety legislation but how those codes are enforced is an important consideration. Individuals planning to travel abroad should be alert to the differences in fire safety measures existing between countries and adjust their expectations accordingly. To aide in that awareness, these helpful tips are provided to aide in any trip planning and preparation.

### Awareness issues:

-  Does your destination require fire, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors?
-  Determine if there are fire alarm pull boxes. Is it a local alarm only or one that reports to an offsite monitoring station? Beware. The alarm may sound different from what you are accustomed to.

### Electrical issues:

-  Always be cautious with electrical items in damp areas (kitchens, bathrooms). Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets are rare overseas.
-  Be aware of potential electrical issues, particularly in older buildings where the electrical capacity is limited and the number of outlets is less than you may be accustomed to. Avoid use of extension cords or octopus adaptors.
-  Be aware of the amperage capacity of any power adaptor. Example: Using a cell phone adaptor to power a hairdryer can result in it overheating, resulting in a possible electrical fire.

### Emergency Exits:

-  Emergency exit requirements overseas are less stringent. Be aware of the very different styles of emergency exit signage, and in some instances the complete lack of exit signs.
-  Emergency exits may be smaller and narrower than in the U.S., thus having less capacity to quickly permit exit. They may also not be in the locations you are traditionally accustomed to seeing them.
-  Do exit doors lack panic hardware - making exit more difficult – and do they swing “in” instead of out making it more difficult to open when a crowd is pushing to leave?
-  Be aware of dead-end hallways without an emergency exit.
-  Are emergency exits located on the building exterior accessible only via a window? Be aware of ladders that will not drop to the ground due to rust and corrosion.

### Building Construction:

-  Typically, in traditional row houses overseas, the building practice is to have a common attic. If a fire occurs in a unit within the same block, evacuate immediately as it could quickly spread through the attic.
-  Buildings may not have interior firewalls or fire doors, resulting in a more rapid spread of fire and smoke.

# Fire Safety for International Travelers

## Tips for Students, Staff and Faculty Going Abroad



Buildings with open atriums may not have automatic smoke venting in the ceiling or roof, resulting in the quicker accumulation of deadly smoke inside a building.



When selecting a residential facility, pay attention to these special considerations:

- Look for non-combustible building construction, i.e. masonry vs. wood floors, etc...
- Look for hardwired smoke detectors.
- Look for fire sprinklers with an adequate water supply.
- Look for buildings with circuit breakers instead of fuses.

### Contents and Décor:



Avoid use of any open flame or high heat near fabric, including upholstered furniture, drapes and wall coverings. These items may not be treated to be “fire resistive” as is required in the U.S.

### Fire Extinguishers:



Locate any and all fire extinguishers “BEFORE” there is a need to use them. Mandates for fire extinguishers overseas are typically less stringent than in the U.S. Some overseas fire codes mandate that fire extinguishers can only be placed on the floor (as opposed to wall mounted), making it more difficult to observe them in an emergency or more likely to disappear.

### General Tips:



With any building, ask for detailed specifics regarding the various possible life safety components of the building. Never accept a blanket statement that the building is in compliance with all fire codes.



Be aware of any potential local disaster risks (earthquake, hurricane, tornado, flooding, etc...) you may not be personally familiar with. Be cognizant of the relative structural integrity of the building you are in and be prepared to take appropriate steps to protect yourself, should the worse occur.

### Emergency Numbers:



Learn the local quick dial numbers. The numbers overseas will likely be different in each city and will not likely be 9-1-1, as in the U.S. It is commonplace abroad for fire, police and medical emergency services to have separate numbers, plus the receiving agency may not have the capability to forward to the proper agency.

### Resources:

Gallagher Higher Education Practice Group – Arthur J. Gallagher Risk Management Services