You’ve designed your research project, met your team members and renewed your passport. Flight arrangements have been made and your itinerary is organized. By all accounts you’re ready for take-off for a summer global research experience. But do you know the latest methods to ensure safety while traveling, or Emory’s specific travel policies for your destination? Who would you call in an emergency? Do you have a go-bag packed?

As an Emory student (staff or faculty) conducting international research this summer, planning your extended in-country stay can be daunting. Even if you’ve traveled extensively before, but especially if this will be your first immersion experience, the annual Pre-Departure Safety and Security Training organized by Rollins School of Public Health, Global Services and the Emory Global Health Institute, is an essential crash-course intraveling basics for challenging destinations. And even the most seasoned travelers can benefit from learning new methods for security and safety.

Mandatory for students traveling abroad for summer practicums funded by the Emory Global Health Institute (EGHI), or those who are a part of the Global Field Experience (GFE) program, the training is designed to cover critical information such as emergency scenarios, traveler health and safety, and cultural adjustment issues faced while representing Emory abroad.

With interactive lectures by Lara Martin, manager of Education and Programs at Center for Humanitarian Emergencies at Rollins School of Public Health, session attendees had the opportunity to ask questions about their individual travel plans, as well as possible scenarios they might encounter.

The trainings were held in a relatively new format; whereas in previous years, the training was a day-long Saturday session, for the past two years, the pre-departure trainings were conducted through a series of brownbag sessions held April 4-7. With new content and featuring staff and consultants from...
across Emory discussing different aspects of international travel and work, these sessions offered an overview of university travel policies and procedures, as well as best practices and special considerations for travelers, security techniques, and tips and tricks for planning the smoothest international experience possible.

An added benefit of these in-person sessions is that it connects students with others who will be traveling abroad in the coming term, as well as those who may be traveling to a particular country. The first day of training included a discussion led by an International SOS (ISOS) representative who detailed the specific services provided to Emory covered travelers through ISOS. ISOS provides worldwide medical and security assistance and evacuation services for all study abroad participants. More specifically, ISOS provides medical assistance, personal assistance, SOS clinics, travel assistance, online services and information, travel safety, and travel planning services to Emory community members with international itineraries. The ISOS program is designed to supplement the policies, procedures, and support staff that Emory employs, and is considered the best tool that students can use when traveling. ISOS travel alerts are an especially helpful resource, sending students country-specific email alerts, such as notifications on disease outbreaks, civil or political unrest, and natural disasters.

In addition to covering more general travel best practices, the trainings also delved into more specific personal safety guidelines, such as sexual assault, harassment, violence, road safety, and ground transportation via taxi and rail. These topics were partnered with an interactive discussion on raising awareness for these issues and risk reduction tactics students can use while traveling abroad.

One of the take-home messages from the training program was that “you control your level of risk” – an essential concept to keep in mind for any traveler. Also included in the sessions was a compilation of safety tips from previous Emory students who lived and worked in challenging environments, which was noted by the audience as one of the most helpful resources presented.

The last day of training was the most interactive, including moderated small group discussions led by Emory alumni with experience in particular regions. These sessions touched on health, safety and cultural scenarios that could be encountered during international work, along with suggested resolutions.

The pre-departure training sessions were recorded and will soon be accessible on the Global Services website. Topics include:

- Language
- Culture
- Travel documents
- Immunizations
- Personal safety & security awareness
- Code of conduct while traveling
- Etiquette & gift giving
- Medical emergencies
- What to do if assaulted
- Emory travel policies
- Booking flights
- ISOS
- Physical & mental health
- Personal risk
- General traveling tips
- Packing lists
- Local ground transportation safety

Armed with up-to-date information and a plan in case of emergency, setting off on a summer field research study has all the potential to be a highlight in a student’s academic career. Safe travels and bon voyage!

“These trainings were informative and I definitely feel more prepared for my travels this summer.”

– Chad Chalker, RSPH, 1st yr