Safety and Security

SIT Study Abroad places the highest priority on the safety and security of all students. SIT’s experience with and knowledge of risk assessment, emergency preparedness, and crisis management allows us to adapt quickly to dynamic challenges. Because socioeconomic, political, environmental, and medical conditions vary widely across the more than 40 countries in which SIT operates, health, safety, and security measures are specifically tailored to each location and to current circumstances.

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are continuously updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. Moreover, your homestay families will help you navigate your new surroundings. They’ll provide firsthand exposure to local norms, model culturally appropriate behavior, and give you precautionary advice about the local environment. The experiential design of the academic program will also contribute to your ability to analyze your own behavior in relation to the host culture, thereby helping you make sound decisions about your safety and security.

Students are expected to adhere to all safety and security parameters as instructed by in-country staff, and to be well versed on all policies detailed in the Student Handbook. As is the case anywhere, there is much you can do on the program to ensure your own safety by simply taking responsibility for your behavior and being extra vigilant in new situations. Being careful about food and beverages, wearing appropriate clothing for the culture and climate, and maintaining your wits, sound judgment, and flexibility will go a long way toward maintaining physical and mental well-being.
Emergency Communication
SIT Study Abroad is available 24 hours a day to respond to and manage student emergencies. Students will be provided with local emergency contact information during in-country orientation. If you call outside of business hours, you will be greeted by an answering service and forwarded to an on-duty SIT Study Abroad staff member.

To reach SIT Study Abroad, please call (802) 258-3212 or (888) 272-7881 (toll free).

In the event of an emergency, SIT Study Abroad may inform your designated emergency contact person of what occurred. A student’s home institution may also be notified in order to facilitate the best possible support for the student and his/her family.

Cell Phone Policy
All students are required to have a working cell phone while on SIT Study Abroad programs. This policy is part of our commitment to student safety and will facilitate communication in case of an emergency. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they are reachable by phone at all times. This means keeping the phone charged and stocked with airtime/minutes as well as notifying staff of, and replacing, lost or stolen phones. Please note that students who do not comply with the cell phone policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

Please see the Country Overview pre-departure document for program-specific recommendations regarding cell phones.

More options for obtaining a cell phone prior to departure can be found here, under the contact and communications tab. Please bear in mind that a basic cell phone with simple call and text messaging is the best option for all programs. Expensive or flashy phones (including iPhones) are not recommended as these may attract unwanted attention in some economically depressed areas.

US State Department
Please make sure you review the US State Department’s Consular Information Sheet for India. This is available at: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1139.html

Should there be developments that require program alterations, SIT Study Abroad personnel will communicate immediately with all participants regarding those proposed changes or program contingencies.

Before the program begins, SIT Study Abroad will register your participation in the program with the US State Department website designed for that purpose. However, if you are traveling independently before or after the program, we strongly recommend that you register your travel plans. Please go to https://travelregistration.state.gov and follow the steps to register with the relevant embassy.

Alcohol and Drug Policy
Alcohol and drug consumption carry serious safety and legal risks, and may lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings. If you choose to drink, consider there are behaviors which may be acceptable on college campuses in the United States (excessive drinking, staying out very late) which are unacceptable in India for both safety and cultural reasons. You will be living with a family that is deeply concerned about your well-being, and you must respect this concern and their generosity in opening their home to you.

Drug use, other than for medical reasons, is strictly prohibited and is grounds for dismissal from the program. Be advised that legal penalties for drug users in many countries are severe and the authorities generally operate on a presumption of guilt. The program will be unable to assist students facing legal trouble resulting from drug use.

General Program Tips
Remember that while you are a student in a cultural education program in India and Myanmar/Burma, you are also an ambassador for your home country, home institution, and SIT Study Abroad. We ask all students to abide by all policies and guidelines in order to help maintain those important relationships as well as their own safety and wellbeing. Failure to abide by established guidelines may result in disciplinary measures. The following are safety tips for your time on the program:

While India and Myanmar/Burma are generally safe countries, as in crowded urban environments anywhere, you should be careful. For example: avoid going to an ATM late at night, don’t take taxis alone late at night (always sit in the back of the taxi), keep your money in a safe place and don’t carry large amounts of cash. Streets in all big cities in India are full of all imaginable types of traffic, animals and people- including vendors and beggars. Female students in particular may attract unwelcome attention; this topic will be addressed extensively during orientation.
Gender roles: Gender role expectations are different from the United States. Relations between the sexes are distanced and formal. To avoid sexual harassment, female students must be cognizant of modesty in both dress and behavior. Male students must be careful not to cause unintentional insult by behaving in an overly familiar manner with Indian women. Please be open to our experienced advice about behavior and dress— we want to keep you safe!

Good Manners: India and Myanmar/Burma are formal hierarchical societies: younger members of the society are not privileged to be casual with elders. For example: You will be expected to stand when an elder enters the room, offer a chair to an elder, express greetings first, give way in a lunch line, and open doors.

Alcohol: Students must exercise discretion if consuming alcohol, as it is in most cases culturally inappropriate and forbidden by age restrictions. Although certain sectors of Delhi society find alcohol consumption acceptable, we expect students to follow the most conservative norms of the host culture. Failure to respect norms regarding consumption of alcohol may compromise the student’s reception in Indian society, humiliate the host family, and may jeopardize SIT’s standing in the community. This is especially important for female students, as the reputation of young women in India is especially vulnerable to charges of immorality regarding public alcohol consumption.

Smoking: Cigarette smoking is considered culturally inappropriate and disrespectful in the presence of elders and teachers, especially for women. Female students who smoke should not smoke in public, as it could be embarrassing to the host family and SIT staff. Male students who smoke should also be aware of the sensibilities of their host families and never smoke before elders or respected members of society. Students should never smoke in the presence of a Buddhist monastic.

Drugs: No drug use of any kind other than for necessary medical purposes will be tolerated. Drug use will be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the program. Also, SIT Study Abroad is unable to assist any student facing legal trouble for drug use.

Cleanliness: Indians and Burmese are meticulous about personal hygiene and dress, and are bewildered and disgusted by the grubby "hippie" look. Cleanliness is not just the privilege of the wealthy: you will see even the poor washing under pumps. It is therefore expected that you will keep your person, hair, and clothing clean. In a hot dusty climate it is also a necessity of personal health to wash hands, body (and especially feet) regularly with a good strong soap. Please note that dreadlocks are the prerogative of sadhus (i.e., holy men of India); anyone else with dreadlocks is seen as extremely disrespectful of local culture. Therefore we must advise students with dreadlocks to change their hairstyle before coming to India.

Clothing: As you will be highly visible in the local community, strict adherence to standards of dress is expected for students, according to the guidelines outlined above. Revealing, ripped, or stained clothing is unacceptable. We will be visiting Myanmar/Burma for five days. It will be hot and humid, but you must be prepared to adhere to conservative notions of modesty. This means being ready to wear sleeves, and to cover the legs at all times. Shoes must be removed before entering temples or monasteries.

Personal Relationships: Romantic relationships between students and host family members or SIT staff are strictly forbidden, as they are neither legally nor culturally acceptable. Any suggestion of such relationships or other inappropriate behavior initiated by a student is subject to the following protocol in order to protect host families and the public profile of SIT:
1. Any inappropriate behavior that embarrasses the host family will result in a three-way meeting with the host family, the student, and the Academic Director. We will attempt to resolve the problem.
2. A second incident will result in termination of the homestay relationship; the student will be expected to stay in a hotel for the remainder of the program at her or his own expense.

If a student’s public conduct is suspected of consistently damaging the program’s reputation and these interventions are ineffective, the student may be dismissed from the program.

Health Insurance
All SIT Study Abroad students have access to accident and sickness insurance as part of their program fee. Some features of the accident/sickness plan include:
- Emergency reunion benefits for one immediate family member
• Medical evacuation in the event of serious emergency
• Security evacuation expenses
• Lost baggage and personal property
• Repatriation and accidental death and dismemberment

Students should note that routine physicals, dental work, and other customary medical care are not covered by this plan. This plan covers accidents and sickness only. Please see our website for a full Description of Coverage and scroll down to Student Health Insurance: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/medical-review-process/

With this insurance, you must pay for all medical expenses at the time of service and then file a claim to be reimbursed. This means that you must have funds available to you in case of emergency. It is strongly suggested that you bring a credit card, either to pay directly for medical expenses or to withdraw cash to cover medical costs in cases where credit cards are not accepted. In cases of severe medical emergencies, on-site staff will work with headquarters and the insurance company to arrange for payment. Under SIT’s insurance, expenses will be reimbursed according to the terms of coverage after the submission of the appropriate claim form.

When you pay for services rendered, make sure to request receipts that you can later submit with your insurance claim form. Most doctors will not accept credit cards so you will need to get a cash advance from the credit card to pay for the services. Some clinics and pharmacies in the bigger cities will accept credit cards.

Personal Property Insurance
Students should be aware of their environment and their belongings throughout the program, and take care to protect against theft whenever possible. Personal property and baggage insurance is included in the program fee for all study abroad program participants through SIT Study Abroad. For details on SIT’s personal property and baggage insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage and scroll down to Student Health Insurance: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/medical-review-process/

Students whose personal property is damaged or stolen will need to complete a claim form and submit it for reimbursement. Students should note this insurance has a maximum reimbursement of $2,500 per person and reimbursement amounts take the depreciation of the item’s value into account. Aside from a personal computer, we do not encourage students to bring very expensive items to the program. If you plan to bring expensive items to the program, you may wish to consider purchasing additional insurance to cover them in the event of loss or theft. If you do experience theft or loss of items, please inform in-country program staff right away.

Health Guidelines and Requirements
Maintaining good health is a critical element of your successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided Health Guidelines and Requirements for your program: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/documents/studyabroad/2016SFA-INR-health.pdf.

It is very important that you read this as early as possible and review it with your medical provider. The guidelines include required and recommended immunizations as specified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, and World Learning; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common disease vectors. Please call your admissions counselor with any questions.

General Health Tips
Here are some important health-related tips based on past student experience:

• Bring a full semester’s supply of important medications with you. We realize that it may be difficult or expensive to fill a prescription for this period in advance. However, it is often impossible to send medications to program sites due to high import taxes, customs seizures, program travel, etc.

• Using physician’s letterhead stationery, have your doctor/physician write the names of your prescriptions and a description for each one. Your doctor should specify that this medication is only to be used by you and is not for sale. This note will be helpful in an emergency, and you should carry it.
with you while traveling, in case you are questioned by immigration authorities.

- **Important medicines should be carried on the plane with you**, not in checked luggage.

- If you are asthmatic, bring an ample supply of inhalers for the entire program, as these cannot be mailed to you from the United States.

- If you have any serious allergies, be sure to bring an epinephrine kit and an antihistamine.

- If you wear contact lenses, bring your own solutions. Bring a pair of glasses as a back-up; if you lose your contacts, you may have difficulty replacing them. In addition, some people find it difficult to wear contacts in a different environment.

- Please take care of all necessary dental work and allow for ample recovery time prior to your program.

The environment in Delhi is physically demanding, both in summer, when the heat, monsoon, and urban pollution will pose specific health challenges, and in winter, when fog, dust, and chilly weather will remind you how close you are to the Himalayan mountain range. High quality health services are available in Delhi, and the SIT program has relationships with excellent doctors, though most students note that the bedside manner of Indian physicians is more distant than that of U.S. physicians. We will discuss health information and important advice and precautions in detail during orientation.

During your stay in India, it will always be advisable to remain conscious of health and safety issues and be more cautious than you might be in the U.S. Luckily, Delhi does not suffer from some of the problems faced by other North Indian cities, such as acute overcrowding and lack of sanitation. Filtered or bottled water is readily available, as is hygienically prepared food. Of course, you should use basic precautions and respect program staff and homestay families’ advice when purchasing food for yourself. Homestay families are accustomed to our students’ needs and are able to provide appropriate food and water that students need not be concerned about eating and drinking.

**Emotional Wellbeing**

Cultural adjustment, academic challenges, a full schedule of classes, travel, field-based activities, and the dynamics of your SIT group can present new challenges to maintaining a good attitude and healthy emotional state. It is important to consider coping strategies in advance. For some students, this may mean personal journaling, exercise, music, movies, leisure reading, or coffee at your favorite café. Thinking ahead and planning for the ups and downs of your time abroad will ensure that you have the tools that you need to take good care of yourself and maintain a positive outlook.

If you have used counseling services on a regular basis, SIT advises that you discuss this program with your mental health professional as early as possible prior to departure. In some cases, students have elected to maintain a phone or email relationship with a provider in the US, though the practicalities of time differences and program demands may make such an arrangement difficult to maintain on a regular basis.

Counseling and psychiatric care is not as widely available in India nor is it utilized in the same way as in the United States. Students should not plan on having regular access to local psychological services. In emergencies, students may be able to consult with a Vermont-based SIT therapist by phone or a counselor/psychiatrist in Delhi.

**WHO Card or Immunization Record**

The International Certificate of Vaccination (also known as the WHO card) is a card used to record medical information such as immunizations and other medical history. We recommend that you bring your Immunization Record or WHO Card. A WHO Card may be obtained from a Travel Clinic or online at: [http://www.who.int/ihr/IVC200_06_26.pdf](http://www.who.int/ihr/IVC200_06_26.pdf)

Please consult your physician to ensure that your WHO card accurately reflects your immunization record. Refer to the Health Guidelines and Requirements document for required and recommended immunizations for your program.
All students should travel with an up-to-date WHO card or Immunization record regardless of whether there are required immunizations for your program at this time. Countries, or localities within countries, may change immunization requirements at any time, so it is important that you have this document available. Without this proof of immunization history, you may be denied entry to certain countries/areas. We recommend keeping your WHO card or Immunization Record with your passport and other important documents, as well as making a photocopy that you keep separately.