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Security Awareness in Foreign Environments (SAFE) Module 1: Travel

Guidelines: Pre-Travel & On-Site

Principles: Reduce your signature (Gray Man), maintain constant situational awareness (OODA Loop, Color Codes, Red Flags), avoid predictable patterns (attackers exploit routines), plan for worst-case scenarios including kidnapping/hostage situations, and leverage official resources.

Official US Government (USG) policy: No concessions to hostage-takers (no ransom, releases, or policy changes).

PRE-TRAVEL CHECKLIST

1. Intelligence & Threat Assessment

- ☐ Review DoS Travel Advisory (travel.state.gov), note any K (Kidnapping/Hostage Taking) indicator and Level (especially 3–4).
- ☐ Conduct area assessment: political stability, crime patterns (current/historic), medical capabilities, infrastructure (power, comms, transport), health/disease risks.
- ☐ Research specific kidnapping threats (criminal vs. ideological actors, hotspots, past incidents, tactics like roadblocks or surveillance).
- ☐ Identify Embassy/Consulate, safe havens, and medical evacuation options.

2. Registration, Documentation & Logistics

- ☐ Enroll in DoS STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program) and register with local Embassy/Consulate.

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- ☐ Secure passports/visas (valid period), digital and physical copies, and emergency contact cards.
- ☐ Obtain required immunizations, medical evacuation insurance, and sufficient medications.
- ☐ Prepare will, DNA samples (if extremely high-risk), and share itinerary with trusted contacts/family.

3. Risk Mitigation & Contingency Planning

- ☐ Build Risk Matrix (frequency vs severity) and mitigation/contingency plans for most-likely and worst-case scenarios (including abduction/hostage).
- ☐ Define actions at lodging, work site, and daily routine; identify rally points for all legs of travel.
- ☐ Develop Communications SOP: code words, emergency signals (verbal/non-verbal), location trackers, and pre-loaded numbers (Embassy, LE, group leader, family).

4. Cultural, Profile & Training Prep

- ☐ Study local culture/religion, behavioral norms, dress codes, male/female dynamics, and trigger terms/acts.
- ☐ Prepare low-profile “Gray Man” clothing/gear and avoid “Ugly American” displays of wealth/status.
- ☐ Train in situational awareness (Endsley’s model, OODA Loop, S.T.O.P., Color Codes, Five-and-Twenty-Five scanning, environmental cues, transitional spaces).
- ☐ Rehearse break-contact drills, early avoidance, and basic evasion/escape procedures.
- ☐ Understand USG no-concessions hostage policy.

ON-SITE GUIDANCE

1. Daily Awareness & Reduced Signature

- Maintain alert mindset and practice constant situational awareness (scan for red flags/surveillance; use OODA/Color Codes).
- Blend in, follow local dress/behavior norms.
- Change-up routes, times, and routines daily.
- Obtain daily threat briefs (Embassy or reliable sources); avoid isolated or high-visibility tourist areas when possible.
- Use small-team overwatch and maintain low profile.

2. Movement & Transportation

- Use trusted/dedicated drivers or vetted taxis; research public bus/train risks.
- Rental vehicle: confirm license/insurance; check for trackers or listening devices.
- Vary all movements; have alternate routes and easily recognizable rally points.

3. Communications Discipline

- Use secure methods: location sharing (with limits), code words, and avoid sensitive discussions or personal information sharing on open lines or in crowded spaces.
- Maintain redundant comms (primary and backup/burner), test emergency signals regularly.
- Report significant changes or concerns to Embassy/trusted contacts promptly.

4. Threat Recognition & Emergency Response

- Watch for early indicators (surveillance, unusual interest, roadblocks, isolation attempts) and employ early avoidance.
- If threat emerges, execute rehearsed break-contact drills with decisive action and violence of action as needed. Use rally points and link-up procedures.
- Know immediate actions for potential abduction/hostage situation (comply minimally if captured to survive, SAFE Module 2).

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- Activate emergency plan: contact Embassy/LE, report details, proceed to rally points/link-up, and follow established recovery guidance.
- Document and report incidents; stay adaptable as situations evolve.

Additional General Guidance

- Update plans as information emerges.
- Prioritize personal security over comfort or schedule in higher-threat environments.
- Build a small trusted local network if safe. Refine the vetting process.
- Mental preparation: Hostage situations often involve prolonged captivity, focus on survival, communication if possible, be prepared for professional recovery efforts (SAFE Module 2).

Sources: SAFE Module 1 (Osprey Shooting Solutions), US Army IPB/IPOE & Protection doctrine, DoS Travel Advisories/STEP/high-risk guidance, PPD-30 hostage policy (no concessions), and lessons from real-world kidnapping incidents (predictable routines as vulnerability, low-profile importance, early detection).