



Is studying abroad an excuse to party?

By Colby Bernel

1/26/2016

Many students study abroad to broaden their horizons beyond their home universities. They want to learn about new cultures, meet new people, see interesting sites and...party hard?

A new study released last week suggests that when students study abroad, some are more likely to indulge in activities like drinking to excess, the taking of controlled substances and hooking up with strangers.

The *Study Abroad Risky Behavior Survey*, conducted by the travel risk management company On Call International and shared with USA TODAY College, found, for instance, that 37% of those surveyed said they blacked out more or equally as often while abroad than at their U.S. schools; 3 in 10 hooked up with a stranger at least once; and 1 in 10 tried a controlled substance for the first time.

But the findings may not surprise some. Come on, we're talking destinations like Barcelona, known for its late nights, and Amsterdam.

Georgetown junior Hannah Howell, who studied in Copenhagen this past fall at the Danish Institute for Study Abroad, says a popular place for students and tourists is the autonomous neighborhood of Christiania. There, she says, "Soft" drugs like marijuana are legal, as are open containers of alcohol.

"You feel like you're not breaking a rule if you're smoking weed or going out every night. You feel like you're almost entitled to it," Howell says.

While she explains that she doesn't drink or smoke, the use of drugs and alcohol was "rampant," she says, and occurred in much greater frequency than at Georgetown.

Jim Hutton, the chief security officer at On Call International, tells USA TODAY College that the advent of social media could well amplify the risks.

With social media in particular, Hutton says, if an incriminating post or photo surfaces, "the personal liability could be higher."

Regardless of what students encounter while studying abroad, Hutton advises them to stick together.

"One takeaway for me is that ... students (should) look out for one another," he says. "That kind of cooperation, I think, would serve you well across a lot of things that are in the survey."

The findings — based on more than 1,000 current and graduated students who've studied abroad in the past two years — are On Call's first formal study of student behavior abroad, so there is no comparative data available from the organization.