

Drugs Abroad

HARD FACTS

Each year, 2,500 Americans are arrested overseas. One third of the arrests are on drug-related charges. Many of those arrested assumed as U.S. citizens that they could not be arrested. From Asia to Africa, Europe to South America, U.S. citizens are finding out the hard way that drug possession or trafficking equals jail in foreign countries.

There is very little that anyone can do to help you if you are caught with drugs.

It is your responsibility to know what the drug laws are in a foreign country before you go, because "I didn't know it was illegal" will not get you out of jail.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women arrested abroad. The rise is a result of women who serve as drug couriers or "mules" in the belief they can make quick money and have a vacation without getting caught. Instead of a short vacation, they get a lengthy stay or life sentence in a foreign jail.

A number of the Americans arrested abroad on drug charges in 1994 possessed marijuana. Many of these possessed one ounce or less of the substance. The risk of being put in jail for just one marijuana cigarette is not worth it.

If you are purchasing prescription medications in quantities larger than that considered necessary for personal use, you could be arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking.

Once you're arrested, the American consular officer **CANNOT** get you out!

You may say "it couldn't happen to me" but the fact is that it could happen to you if you find yourself saying one of the following:

... *"I'm an American citizen and no foreign government can put me in their jail."*

... *"If I only buy or carry a small amount, it won't be a problem."*

If you are arrested on a drug charge it is important that you know what your government **CAN** and **CANNOT** do for you.

The U.S. Consular Officer **CAN**

- visit you in jail after being notified of your arrest
- give you a list of local attorneys (The U.S. Government cannot assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of these individuals or recommend a particular attorney.)
- notify your family and/or friends and relay requests for money or other aid -- but only with your authorization
- intercede with local authorities to make sure that your rights *under local law* are fully observed and that you are treated humanely, according to internationally accepted standards
- protest mistreatment or abuse to the appropriate authorities

The U.S. Consular Officer **CANNOT**

- demand your immediate release or get you out of jail or the country!
- represent you at trial or give legal counsel
- pay legal fees and/or fines with U.S. Government funds

If you are caught buying, selling, carrying or using drugs -- from hashish to heroin, marijuana to mescaline, cocaine to quaaludes, to designer drugs like ecstasy....

IT COULD MEAN:

Interrogation and Delays Before Trial - including mistreatment and solitary confinement for up to one year under very primitive conditions

Lengthy Trials - conducted in a foreign language, with delays and postponements

Weeks, Months or Life in Prison - some places include hard labor, heavy fines, and/or lashings, if found guilty

The Death Penalty - in a growing number of countries (e.g., Malaysia and Pakistan)

Although drug laws vary from country to country, it is important to realize before you make the mistake of getting involved with drugs that foreign countries do not react lightly to drug offenders. In some countries, anyone who is caught with even a very small quantity for personal use may be tried and receive the same sentence as the large-scale trafficker.

DON'T LET YOUR TRIP ABROAD BECOME A NIGHTMARE!

This information has been provided to inform you before it is too late.

SO THINK FIRST!

- A number of countries, including the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico and the Philippines, have enacted more stringent drug laws which impose mandatory jail sentences for individuals convicted of possessing even small amounts of marijuana or cocaine for personal use.
- Once you leave the United States, you are not covered by U.S. laws and constitutional rights.
- Bail is not granted in many countries when drugs are involved.
- The burden of proof in many countries is on the accused to prove his/her innocence.
- In some countries, evidence obtained illegally by local authorities may be admissible in court.
- Few countries offer drug offenders jury trials or even require the prisoner's presence at his/her trial.
- Many countries have mandatory prison sentences of seven years or life, without the possibility of parole for drug violations.

REMEMBER!

- If someone offers you a free trip and some quick and easy money just for bringing back a suitcase.... **SAY NO!**
- Don't carry a package for anyone, no matter how small it might seem.
- The police and customs officials have a right to search your luggage for drugs. If they find drugs in **your** suitcase, **you** will suffer the consequences.
- You could go to jail for years and years with no possibility of parole, early release or transfer back to the U.S.
- Don't make a jail sentence part of your trip abroad.

The Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs' Office of Overseas Citizens Services provides emergency services pertaining to the protection of Americans arrested or detained abroad, the search for U.S. citizens overseas, the transmission of emergency messages to those citizens or their next of kin in the United States and other emergency and non-emergency services. Contact the Office of Overseas Citizens Services from Monday through Friday, 8:15 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at (202) 647-5225. For an emergency after hours or on weekends and holidays, ask for the Overseas Citizens Services' duty officer at (202) 647-4000. Internet home page: <http://travel.state.gov>



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