

# DRUGS AND TRAVEL: Why They Don't Mix



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# DRUGS AND TRAVEL: Why They Don't Mix

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This publication is available in alternative formats upon request.

*Ce document est aussi disponible en français (La drogue et les voyages : un cocktail explosif).*

*Note: The information contained in this booklet is subject to change. Please consult our Web site or the other resources listed in the "For More Information" section (page 14) for the most up-to-date information. That section also includes information on publications and programs available from Foreign Affairs Canada.*

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## Introduction

Canadians love to travel. Each year, millions of Canadians travel to cities, beaches and rural areas throughout the world. In many of these countries, illegal drugs are readily available and openly used. Nonetheless, they remain illegal. Canadians get into serious trouble for buying, selling, using or transporting drugs.

Thousands of Canadians are languishing in jails throughout the world – many of them for drug-related offences. Being Canadian doesn't exempt you from local laws regarding illegal drugs. If you break the law in another country, you are subject to that country's judicial system. Canadian consular officials can provide assistance and support to Canadians in jail abroad, but they cannot arrange for their release.

### Before You Go

Travel can be a wonderful and rewarding experience. But careful preparation is key to any successful trip abroad. Before you leave, research your destination. Its culture, customs and regulations may differ from those of Canada. Consult the Country Travel Reports and the other travel advice available at [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca).

This brochure provides information and advice to help you make the most of your holiday and avoid difficult and dangerous situations related to illegal drugs. Getting involved with narcotics could put your health at risk and jeopardize your whole future, so don't take any chances. Before you go, make sure you get the facts and take the necessary precautions.

## Do's and Don'ts

### Do!

- Do pack your luggage yourself. Make sure it is locked and never leave it unattended.
- Do keep an eye on your children's backpacks, toys and stuffed animals. Someone could slip drugs inside without you knowing.
- Do choose your travelling companions carefully. If they turn out to be carrying, using or selling illegal drugs, you could be charged by association. Make sure they know where you stand on drugs *before you leave*.
- Do ask local authorities, a travel agent or hotel staff which areas are unsafe. You could be attacked or arrested if dealers are nearby and it's assumed you are carrying or selling drugs. Always have an up-to-date map with you.

### Innocent Victim

I went on vacation with a girlfriend, Helen, to Venezuela. But we weren't enjoying our stay and we decided to continue our vacation in France, where a close friend of Helen lives. We couldn't get seats on the same flight, so I left one day before Helen with her gift to her friend: bookends in the shape of an elephant. When she asked me to add them to my

### Don't!

- Don't carry parcels, gifts or luggage for other people across borders or through customs – under any circumstances.
- Don't cross a border with a hitchhiker or as a hitchhiker: you could be found guilty by association.
- Don't use drugs. Period. You can then be sure you won't be joining the significant number of Canadians currently serving drug-related sentences abroad.

luggage, I jokingly said something about drugs being concealed in them. We both laughed.

Imagine my shock at Orly airport when officials told me I was under arrest for drug possession. Despite my plea of innocence, I was sentenced to five years in jail.

### One-way Trip

Martha met Robert while she was on vacation in Jamaica. When she was with him, she felt alive again. Things hadn't been easy for Martha in the last few years: her husband had died and she was raising their two children by herself. Martha made several trips to Jamaica to meet Robert. The last one turned out to be one-way.

Martha's parents were devastated to learn from a friend of Robert's that their daughter had been arrested abroad. They immediately contacted consular officers of Foreign Affairs Canada to find out what had happened. With Martha's permission, the officers told her parents the story: she was arrested carrying two kilos of cocaine in the soles of her shoes. She is now facing five to 20 years in jail.

Martha's two children were travelling with her when she was arrested. Her mother secured custody of the children and went to get them in Jamaica. She met her daughter in prison and was horrified to find that she didn't even have a bed. Martha was in a miserable state.

Martha's parents, both retired, now have to send hundreds of dollars to her every month so that she will have the absolute minimum in prison: personal hygiene products, extra food, medicine and so forth. After a few months, all their savings are spent. They have remortgaged their home to pay the lawyer.

Time is passing and their daughter is still awaiting trial. She has lost a lot of weight and is recovering with difficulty from a severe depression. Robert had convinced her that the risks involved in drug trafficking were minimal. If worse came to worse, he told her, he knew his country's judicial system well and would get her out of prison in a flash....

Failing a miracle, Martha will be in prison for at least five years. What will her children's attitude be when she gets out? How will she put her life back together?

## Short-term Gain, Long-term Pain

When you're on vacation and far away from your regular life, it can be easy to give in to temptation and take illegal drugs, especially in countries where drugs are used openly. But the fact remains: they're still illegal. Remember that in many countries you are part of the visible minority. Taking drugs just once could turn your dream vacation into a nightmare.

### Zero Tolerance

The United States has zero tolerance for possession and smuggling of illicit drugs. Travellers caught with even a small amount will end up in jail.

Be aware that some drugs that are legal in Canada are illegal in other countries. Similarly, drugs that are legal abroad might be illegal in Canada. Travellers are subject to the judicial system of the country they are in. It is their responsibility to know what the drug laws are in a foreign country before they go.

### Prescriptions

When you are abroad, even prescription medication can be treated as suspect, leading to delays and time-consuming investigations. Keep all medication in its original, labelled container and carry a note from your doctor explaining its use.

Illegal drugs can alter your perception of reality and affect your emotions and judgment. Some people have sustained serious injuries as a result of the hallucinogenic effects of narcotics or natural substances that are said to have "special" powers. Most illegal drugs are addictive, and mixing them with prescription drugs can be especially volatile. Illegal drugs can affect your heartbeat, blood pressure and respiration, resulting in loss of consciousness, coma and even death.

Because illegal drugs can impair your faculties, you shouldn't drive if you've taken drugs. It is unlawful to drive under the influence, and you could be putting yourself and others at risk. If you get sick or are injured while on drugs, your travel insurance might not cover your medical or hospital expenses.

### Ecstasy

Ecstasy (also known as MDMA, X, XTC, Adam, euphoria and love doves) is widely used among high school and college students and by young adults who frequent night-clubs or raves. But it is an illegal drug in most countries.

Ecstasy is manufactured in labs and is usually sold in the form of a white or off-white powder taken orally. Effects occur in 30 to 60 minutes and last about eight hours. Ecstasy produces a sense of well-being and heightened tactile sensations and emotions. The pupils dilate, blood pressure increases, and the nose and throat become dry. Users may become overheated and dehydrated if they don't drink enough fluids. An overdose can cause death. (The effects of other narcotics are listed on pages 12 and 13.)

When you buy illegal drugs, you never really know what you're getting. A recent survey by the Addiction Research Foundation in Ontario revealed that almost two thirds of all drug samples obtained on the black market were different from what the seller had claimed.

### A Bad Trip

Peter, 22, was having a great time celebrating the end of term in a Miami bar when he began to feel strange. The hash he had used didn't seem to be having its usual effect. Drenched in sweat, Peter now felt like throwing up, and was barely able to make it to the washroom. Suddenly the room began to spin and everything went black.

Peter awoke in hospital hooked up to an IV. He had missed his plane, and his insurance was refusing to pay his hospital bill. His little holiday misadventure cost him thousands of dollars. A trip to remember!

Travellers who use narcotics are putting themselves in a very vulnerable position. They may not remember how to get back to where they are staying and they could become a prime target for criminals. Someone who is high can easily be attacked, robbed or sexually assaulted.

It's a good idea to keep the name and address of your hotel with you at all times. Avoid going out alone at night. If you go out with a group, you should keep tabs on one

another. Don't let anyone separate you from the group. When you check into your hotel, ask for the local emergency number and the address of the nearest hospital, and keep that information handy when you go out.

## Resist the Temptation

One day you might be offered a fabulous deal: a free round-trip ticket to a sun destination and a tidy sum of money in exchange for carrying a few kilos of drugs through customs. You might be tempted to take the bait.

### *Here are the reasons for saying no:*

- Many countries will not release you on bail pending trial. You could spend months, even a year, in a cell by yourself or with people who don't speak English.
- If you break the law in another country, you are subject to that country's justice system. In many countries, offenders are guilty until proven innocent. Drug convictions lead to long prison terms and even the death penalty in some countries. Canada cannot intervene to secure your release.

### **Behind Bars for a Long Time, or Worse...**

In Tunisia, serious drug-related charges may result in 20 years' imprisonment plus a fine. In some countries, such as Venezuela, drug traffickers face life imprisonment. Algeria, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand can impose the death sentence for offences related to narcotics.

- As a Canadian in a foreign prison, you will experience living conditions that will put you to the test both physically and mentally.
- You will be separated from your loved ones. While you are in jail abroad, you could become a serious financial burden to your family.
- If you are arrested and convicted by Canadian authorities when you come home, you will have a criminal record in Canada.
- You will probably never be allowed to return to the country in which you were arrested.
- If you get sick after your arrest, you may have trouble getting treatment. You could also contract a viral infection or a disease in prison.
- Every day you will know shame, anger, depression, guilt and remorse.

Each year, hundreds of people try to smuggle drugs and end up deeply regretting their mistake. Instead of "getting out from under," they get in even deeper and land in prison. Some may make it through customs

in the country they visited, but they may not be so lucky back in Canada. The Canada Border Services Agency uses state-of-the-art detection techniques.

### **Life at Stake**

Roger, 55, was arrested on drug-trafficking charges while trying to leave Thailand. He was transferred to a hospital to undergo a drug elimination process since he had admitted to swallowing 100 capsules of heroin. With Roger's permission, Canadian consular staff informed his wife of his arrest. She was very upset and started to cry.

Two days later, Roger was transferred to the intensive care unit. Half of the highly toxic capsules were still in his system. He slipped in and out of consciousness, an indication that the heroin was seeping into his system. Too much seepage could result in brain damage or even death. If just one capsule broke open, it could be fatal. Because of his medical problems and age, surgery was too risky. Roger was receiving medication to counter the drugs in his system, as well as laxatives to purge them: a delicate balance.

Roger then slowly started to improve. About a week later, he was transferred to a prison where he shares a small cell with six others and is allowed outside for half an hour a day. Meanwhile, his wife has to pay his hospital and legal bills, the cost of all his medication and his expenses for toiletries, clothes and other incidentals. The lawyer alone cost over US\$4,000. She has to send several months of medical supplies in advance to ensure they arrive on time.

Roger currently awaits his trial, hoping for a better sentence than the death penalty, the maximum sentence in Thailand for drug smuggling.



**A foreign prison – not like life at home.**

## **What to Do if You Are Arrested**

You should make it clear to the arresting authorities that you want to immediately notify Canadian consular staff that you have been arrested. Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, authorities are required to inform

you of your right to talk to and make arrangements with a consular representative. They are not required to notify the Canadian consular or diplomatic office that you are in custody or have been arrested unless you specifically ask them to do so.



**Meal service.**

## **What the Government of Canada Can Do for You**

The services that Canada's consular staff can provide in the event a Canadian is arrested vary from case to case and country to country. Consular staff can:

- notify your family or friends of your situation at your request;
- provide information about the country's legal and correctional systems;

- provide a list of lawyers who have expertise in your particular type of case;
- try to ensure that treatment by the courts and prison conditions are equal to the standards applied to nationals of that country.

***There are things that consular staff cannot do for you. They can't:***

- get you out of jail;
- post bail, pay fines or provide legal assistance;
- choose or recommend a lawyer.

## Effects of Drugs

The following table is intended only as a general guide. No one can be sure how they will react after taking a specific drug, even if they have used it before. Illicit drugs are often mixed with other substances.

If you are with someone who becomes ill or unconscious after using drugs, call an ambulance and try to find out what drugs are involved. If you find drugs on or near the person, give them to the ambulance crew. This could save a life.

Drug	Effects	Health Risks
<p><b><i>Cannabis</i></b></p> <p>Also called marijuana, hashish, hash, pot, herb, weed, grass</p>	<p>Users feel relaxed, free and open. They may become talkative or withdrawn and experience food cravings.</p> <p>Effects last two to three hours.</p>	<p>Users experience problems with memory, thinking and problem solving, loss of coordination and increased heart rate.</p> <p>Some users feel severe anxiety.</p>
<p><b><i>Cocaine and Crack Cocaine</i></b></p> <p>Cocaine also called coke, C, snow, flake</p> <p>Crack cocaine also called crack, rock, base, sugar block</p>	<p>Users can feel intense pleasure and become alert, energetic and confident. They may be talkative, anxious and paranoid.</p> <p>Effects last for five minutes to two hours, and then users feel depressed, anxious and irritable. Each time, they need more cocaine to obtain the same effects.</p>	<p>Cocaine increases breathing, heart rate and blood pressure.</p> <p>It may produce eating and sleeping disorders and violent and erratic behaviour. It can also cause respiratory problems, convulsions and cardiac or respiratory arrest.</p>

Drug	Effects	Health Risks
<p><b><i>Heroin</i></b></p> <p>Also called smack, horse, junk, H</p>	<p>Users feel a surge of euphoria and then alternate between wakeful and drowsy states for several hours. Heroin also makes physical pain disappear.</p> <p>Effects last a few hours.</p>	<p>Nausea, vomiting and severe itching are common reactions.</p> <p>Users can't think clearly and experience mood swings. Large doses can reduce breathing so much that users slip into a coma and may die.</p> <p>Since users cannot be aware of the strength of street heroin, overdose and death often occur.</p>
<p><b><i>GHB, Ketamine and Rohypnol®</i></b></p> <p>Also called "date rape" drugs</p>	<p>Users feel relaxed, drowsy and sometimes euphoric. They lose inhibitions.</p> <p>Effects can last up to 24 hours.</p>	<p>Users can be incapacitated and unable to resist sexual assault.</p> <p>Excessive use could lead to seizures and even collapse.</p> <p>When mixed with other drugs, including alcohol, overdose can occur quickly and be fatal.</p>
<p><b><i>Stimulants (amphetamine, methamphetamine, ecstasy)</i></b></p> <p>Also called upper, speed, meth, chalk, ice, love drug</p>	<p>Oral or intranasal doses can make users feel alert and energetic.</p> <p>After smoking or intravenous injection, users experience a brief but intense sensation that is described as extremely pleasurable.</p> <p>Effects last various lengths of time depending on the drug.</p>	<p>Users may feel confused, irritable, anxious and even aggressive. Stimulants may lead to overheating and dehydration. They may cause tremors and insomnia.</p> <p>They can also increase heart rate and blood pressure and cause irreversible damage to blood vessels in the brain, producing strokes.</p>



## For More Information

### Foreign Affairs Canada

Web site: [www.fac-aec.gc.ca](http://www.fac-aec.gc.ca)

### Consular Affairs Bureau

Web site: [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)  
General:

Tel.: 1 800 267-6788

(in Canada and the U.S.) or

(613) 944-6788

E-mail: [voyage@international.gc.ca](mailto:voyage@international.gc.ca)

TTY: 1 800 394-3472 (in Canada  
and the U.S.) or (613) 944-1310

Emergencies:

Tel.: (613) 996-8885 (call collect  
from abroad)

E-mail: [sos@international.gc.ca](mailto:sos@international.gc.ca)

### Publications (free)

- *Bon Voyage, But... Information for the Canadian Traveller*
- *Canadian Consular Services: Providing Assistance to Canadians Abroad*
- *Canadian Performers: How to Enter the United States*
- *Child Sex Tourism Fact Sheet* (on-line only)
- *China (Including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region): A Guide for Canadian Visitors*
- *Destination: Success – Services for Business Travellers*
- *Dual Citizenship: What Travellers Should Know*

- *Guess Who Was Detained at the Border for Drugs!*
- *A Guide for Canadians Imprisoned Abroad*
- *Her Own Way: Advice for the Woman Traveller*
- *International Adoption and the Immigration Process* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada publication – on-line only)
- *International Child Abductions: A Manual for Parents*
- *México: ¿Qué pasa? A Guide for Canadian Visitors*
- *Out on a Limb: Advice for the Adventure Traveller*
- *Retirement Abroad: Seeing the Sunsets*
- *Teaching English in Korea* (on-line only)
- *Teaching English in Taiwan* (on-line only)
- *Travelling Abroad? Assistance for Canadians*
- *U.S.A. Bound: Advice for Canadian Travellers*
- *What No Child Should Endure*
- *Working Abroad: Unravelling the Maze*

### To access or order:

Web site:

[www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/)

[pub\\_order-en.asp](http://pub_order-en.asp)

Tel.: 1 800 267-8376 (in Canada) or  
(613) 944-4000

### Country Travel Reports (free)

These reports ([www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)) provide information on safety and security conditions, health issues and entry requirements for over 200 travel destinations. This information is also available by phone: Tel.: 1 800 267-6788 (in Canada and the U.S.) or (613) 944-6788

### Canadian Government Offices Abroad

Visit [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca) and click on “Foreign Destinations” and then on “List of Canadian Government Offices Abroad.”

### Diplomatic, Consular and Other Representatives in Canada

Visit [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca) and click on “Foreign Destinations” and then on “Foreign Government Offices Accredited to Canada.”

### Drugs and Travel Information Program

Web site: [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)

### Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres

Web site: [www.casac.ca](http://www.casac.ca)

E-mail: [headoffice@casac.ca](mailto:headoffice@casac.ca)

Tel.: (604) 876-2622

Fax: (604) 876-8450

### Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

Web site: [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)

E-mail: [ccsa@ccsa.ca](mailto:ccsa@ccsa.ca)

Tel.: (613) 235-4048

Fax: (613) 235-8101

### Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse

Web site:

[www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca](http://www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca)

### Publication (\$)

- *Basic Facts About AIDS*

### To order:

1565 Carling Avenue, Suite 400

Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1

Tel.: (613) 725-3434

### Canadian Public Health Association

Web site: [www.cpha.ca](http://www.cpha.ca)

E-mail: [info@cpha.ca](mailto:info@cpha.ca)

Tel.: (613) 725-3769

### Canadian Society for International Health

List of travel clinics:

Web site: [www.csih.org](http://www.csih.org)

E-mail: [csih@csih.org](mailto:csih@csih.org)

Tel.: (613) 241-5785

**Publication (free)**

- *Health Information for Canadian Travellers*

**To order:**

1 Nicholas Street, Suite 1105  
Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7  
Tel.: (613) 241-5785

**Centre for Addiction and Mental Health**

Web site: [www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)  
E-mail: [public\\_affairs@camh.net](mailto:public_affairs@camh.net)  
Tel.: (416) 979-4250  
*Automated Response Line:*  
Tel.: 1 800 463-6273 (in Ontario) or  
(416) 595-6111  
Fax: (416) 595-6881

**Health Canada**

Web sites:  
*Health Canada:* [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)  
*Travel Medicine Program:*  
[www.travelhealth.gc.ca](http://www.travelhealth.gc.ca)  
Tel.: (613) 957-8739  
FAXlink: (613) 941-3900

**International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers (IAMAT)**

Web site: [www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org)  
E-mail: [info@iamat.org](mailto:info@iamat.org)  
Tel.: (519) 836-0102 or  
(416) 652-0137

**MedicAlert®**

Web site: [www.medicalert.ca](http://www.medicalert.ca)  
E-mail: [medinfo@medicalert.ca](mailto:medinfo@medicalert.ca)  
Tel.: 1 800 668-6381