While China is generally considered safe, the country is not without certain risks – especially for student travelers. Familiarize yourself with Chinese customs and regulations, but understand that the legal system can be opaque and the enforcement of laws arbitrary. Above all, China aims to preserve social harmony by limiting political dissent and unrest. Have no expectations of privacy in public or private locations, and be prepared for heightened scrutiny and surveillance. Hotel rooms, residences, and offices may be accessed without the occupant’s knowledge or consent.

The Chinese government has publicly declared that it regularly monitors private email traffic and Internet browsing. Remove personal and sensitive information from your devices before you travel. If you must bring laptops or cell phones, keep them in your possession at all times. Do not accept free thumb drives, open suspicious links, or connect to unsecured wireless networks. Protect your electronics with up-to-date anti-virus software.

Understand that many news and social media websites (e.g., Facebook, Gmail, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) are blocked in China, and plan accordingly. Be cautious (but courteous) with strangers who randomly express an interest in speaking with you – such as requesting to “practice English” or “share tea.” Always ask the price before enjoying drinks, meals, or other services to avoid exorbitant fares.

Use only authorized taxis and trusted ride-share services. Have your destination written down in English & Chinese. Be wary of suspicious calls in which callers pose as police. Never wire money to unknown or unverified recipients.

Be aware that your conversations and communications are not private, and safeguard sensitive information. Even if you don’t consider the content of your emails, contacts, or calendars to be “secrets,” foreign intelligence operatives may still find such information valuable. Be mindful of strangers and acquaintances who probe you for information or attempt to get you involved in what could become a compromising situation. Avoid gossiping about your fellow classmates or criticizing your program or country. Information from these conversations could be used for exploitation or blackmail.

For additional information: Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) OSAC China Crime & Safety Report: Beijing Consular Affairs (Travel.State.Gov) State Department: Students Abroad U.S. Embassy Beijing No. 55 Anjialou Road, Chaoyang District Beijing, China 100600 Phone: (+86-10) 8531-4000 (or 011-86-10-8531-4000 from U.S.)