# FCDO updates travel advice as drug offences carry harsher penalties in nearly 50 countries



The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has issued a significant update to its travel guidance, focusing on the risks associated with illegal drug offences in nearly 50 countries. This advisory comes in the wake of a troubling incident involving an 18-year-old British woman, Bella Culley, who stands accused of attempting to smuggle 14kg of cannabis into Georgia. Culley, hailing from Billingham in Teesside, faces potentially dire consequences, including a life sentence, after being arrested at Tbilisi International Airport. She reportedly vanished in Thailand before her apprehension, raising concerns about the perils faced by young travellers in foreign jurisdictions.

The update highlights the severe penalties that can result from drug-related charges, even in countries where cannabis has been legalised to some extent. Following Thailand's recent legalisation of low-strength cannabis, the FCDO is particularly keen for travellers to be aware that carrying the substance—even inadvertently—can lead to serious legal repercussions. The government warns that criminal gangs are known to exploit unwitting individuals, often encouraging them to transport items through customs on their behalf, which can result in life-altering consequences.

In light of these events, the FCDO's updated guidance specifically calls out 48 nations, including Albania, Belgium, Georgia, and the USA, where drug offences can result in hefty fines or extended prison sentences. In some jurisdictions, even trace amounts of controlled substances found on a traveller's clothing can lead to arrest. As enforcement measures become increasingly sophisticated, with airports employing advanced technology to detect illegal items, the stakes for travellers have risen considerably. The Foreign Office's warning serves as a stark reminder to British citizens: "Don’t smuggle illegal drugs. There are severe penalties for possessing, using, or smuggling illegal drugs, including cannabis."

Popular holiday destinations are not exempt from these stringent laws. For example, Greece has implemented rigorous security measures at its airports, making it clear that possession of minor amounts can result in long prison terms. The advisory underlines the necessity for travellers to remain vigilant and informed before embarking on international trips, encouraging them to consult the FCDO's travel advice platform for detailed guidance on 226 countries.

With more than 400 Brits currently incarcerated around the globe on drug-related charges, the ramifications of ignoring these warnings can be significant. Bella Culley's case serves as a cautionary tale about the potential pitfalls of international travel in a landscape where drug laws vary considerably from one location to another. The FCDO's strong messaging, delivered through official channels and social media, is designed to ensure that other potential travellers heed the risks, ideally preventing further unfortunate situations before they arise.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2064621/foreign-office-updates-travel-advice-48-countries-brit-faces-life-prison), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drug-crime-not-worth-the-risk)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2064621/foreign-office-updates-travel-advice-48-countries-brit-faces-life-prison), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/saudi-arabia/safety-and-security), [[4]](https://www.gbnews.com/travel/travel-warning-indonesia-bali-drugs-britons-imprisoned)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/mexico/regional-risks), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drugs-leave-hundreds-of-brits-behind-bars-overseas)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/nov/21/foreign-office-drugs-risks-abroad)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2064621/foreign-office-updates-travel-advice-48-countries-brit-faces-life-prison> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drug-crime-not-worth-the-risk> - The UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) has updated its travel guidance for nearly 50 destinations, highlighting the severe penalties for drug-related offences abroad. The case of Bella Culley, an 18-year-old British woman arrested in Georgia for attempting to smuggle 14kg of cannabis, underscores the risks. The FCDO warns travellers against carrying items through customs for others, as criminal gangs may exploit individuals for drug smuggling. The advisory lists 48 countries, including Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Latvia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burundi, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the USA, where drug-related offences carry severe penalties. The FCDO urges travellers to stay informed by checking the latest travel advice on the gov.uk website, which provides detailed information for 226 countries.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/saudi-arabia/safety-and-security> - The UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) has updated its travel guidance for nearly 50 destinations, highlighting the severe penalties for drug-related offences abroad. The case of Bella Culley, an 18-year-old British woman arrested in Georgia for attempting to smuggle 14kg of cannabis, underscores the risks. The FCDO warns travellers against carrying items through customs for others, as criminal gangs may exploit individuals for drug smuggling. The advisory lists 48 countries, including Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Latvia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burundi, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the USA, where drug-related offences carry severe penalties. The FCDO urges travellers to stay informed by checking the latest travel advice on the gov.uk website, which provides detailed information for 226 countries.
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