

**The Washington  
College  
Study Abroad Guide**

**2024-2025**



*Washington College*

WASHINGTON COLLEGE

GLOBAL EDUCATION OFFICE

*Advice for students and their families in  
preparation for an academic experience  
abroad*

Global Education Office  
Washington College  
Chestertown, MD

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Important Phone Numbers and Websites.....	3
Pre-Departure Checklist.....	4
Useful Travel Apps.....	6
Required Documents.....	7
Health & Safety.....	8
Insurance.....	13
Travel Plans.....	15
Packing Tips.....	18
Local Transportation.....	19
Host Institution Procedures While Abroad.....	21
Washington College Procedures While Abroad.....	22
Money Matters.....	23
Communications.....	26
Practical Information.....	28
Exploring Cultural Differences.....	29
Racial and Religious Issues.....	34
LGBTQ Travelers.....	35
Special Note to Women Travelers.....	36
Keeping a Journal.....	36
Coming Home.....	38

## Important Phone Numbers and Websites

Washington College Global Education Office  
<https://www.washcoll.edu/offices/global-education/>

Sarah Lyle  
Assistant Director for GEO  
slyle2@washcoll.edu 410-810-5038

Washington College Public Safety  
(Officer is available 24/7) 410-778-7810

**United States Department of State ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov))**  
**Overseas Citizens Services** 1-888-407-4747  
(from overseas: 202-501-4444)

For answers related to questions concerning:

- Death of an American citizen abroad
- Arrest/detention of an American citizen abroad
- Robbery of an American citizen abroad
- American citizens missing abroad
- Crisis abroad involving American citizens
- After-hours number for an emergency involving an American citizen abroad

### **Tips for Students Abroad: U.S. Department of State**

- Register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program here: <http://studentsabroad.state.gov/>

### **Important Resources for Travelers:**

Centers for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) 404-639-3311  
World Health Organization (WHO) (<https://www.who.int/>) 202-974-3000

## **Pre-departure Checklist:**

*Moving forward, you will need to be in contact and communication with your host institution. Make sure to read, save, and print all communication from your host university. They will be working with you to arrange classes, housing, and, if provided, airport pick-up.*

### **@Washington College:**

- Make sure that your passport is valid for 6 months from the end of your program, and you have secured the appropriate visa, resident permit, or visitor permit for your host country.
  - Meet with your Financial Aid Advisor to ensure that you know when and how your loans will be distributed.
  - If you live on-campus, make sure to tell Residential Life that you will be vacating your room for the semester.
  - Complete the study abroad Course Approval form. Make sure to get Department Chair and your Faculty Advisor's signatures. Turn this form in to the Global Education Office by stated deadline.
  - Pay your Washington College tuition bill and other necessary fees for next semester.
  - Discuss summer job and/or internship plans with Career Services. Know that your student visa does not allow you to legally work or intern in your host country. You cannot get a work visa before you go unless you have an employer willing to sponsor your visa.

### **With family:**

#### **HEALTH & SAFETY**

- Check with the Center for Disease Control and World Health Organization for any immunizations you may be required to have in your host country. WHO: <http://www.who.int/ith/en/> and CDC: <http://www.who.int/ith/en/>
- Visits to medical providers before studying abroad are recommended so you can go abroad with a clean bill of health.
- Make arrangements to take a full supply of necessary medications, prescriptions, eye-glasses, etc. with you.
- Work with your physician to take enough prescription medication with you if possible.
- Take the pharmacy overview of your prescription with you in case you need to fill it overseas. All medications MUST be in their original packaging. Do not put your medications in Ziplock bags. Take your favorite over the counter

products with you as they may not be available or may be very costly abroad.

## **INSURANCE**

- Talk with your U.S. health insurance company to find out how you will be insured abroad and how you can access their services overseas.
- Take the Chubb Emergency Insurance with you when traveling overseas and share that information with your family.
- Register your trip with the State Department through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). This will ensure that the embassy/consulate in your host country is aware of your presence in the country. STEP: <http://studentsabroad.state.gov> Submit proof of enrollment to GEO

## **TRAVEL PLANS**

- Once you have been accepted at your host institution, purchase tickets based on your host institution's suggested arrival date. You are not typically allowed to move into your residence early. Students do get hotels or hostels if they plan to arrive before the start of their program.
- Round-trip tickets are more economical than one-way tickets, but keep in mind that most students will *not* know their exam schedules before they start their courses. Be prepared to either hang out for a couple weeks if you finish exams early, or pay a change of flight fee. Consider getting flexible tickets in case you need to change your travel plans.
- Investigate train passes, hostel cards, and other options that may be easier to purchase stateside than once you are abroad

## **MONEY MATTERS**

- Plan a budget taking into consideration host institution information and your current financial aid package.
- Secure an emergency fund (recommended minimum = \$400)
- Review host institution recommendations on the amount of money for start-up costs (i.e. deposits)
- Arrange to have \$200 in local currency to bring with you if possible. Plan to bring appropriate credit cards and bank cards. Be sure to let your credit card company and bank know where you will be traveling. Check with your credit card company and bank to know what surcharges you will incur when taking money out overseas.
- Depending on length of stay, look into opening a bank account in your host country. You will need all your immigration documents, proof of residence, an initial deposit, and other documentation required of the bank. It is more difficult to open a bank account overseas than in the U.S. When opening a bank account abroad, make sure to find out if you will be given an ATM or debit card; if they have online access; what type of customer service they provide; and what type of currency you will be able to keep your money in.

## COMMUNICATION

- Make arrangements to update your current cell phone to work in your host country or make plans to purchase a cell phone overseas. Some students purchase temporary phones during their time abroad with pay-as-you-go plans.
- Get friends and family set-up with WhatsApp, Zoom, Discord, Google Hangouts, i-chat, or whatever free internet-based communication you use regularly and will have access to abroad. Some universities, such as Rhodes in South Africa, have internet quotas. You may not have unlimited access to the internet.
- Make sure you take the appropriate converter or adapters to plug in your computer, phone, and other electronic devices.

## USEFUL TRAVEL APPS

(free unless otherwise specified)

### MAPS:

Google Maps  
AllSubway HD (\$)  
London Tube Deluxe  
Uber  
Citymapper

### TRANSLATION:

Google Translate  
iSayHello  
iTranslate  
(How to) Pronounce

### TALK/CHAT:

iMessage  
WhatsApp  
Viber  
Skype  
HeyTell  
Vonage  
Slack

### ADAPT:

XE Currency Converter  
ATM Hunter (for MasterCard holders)  
Converter+

### PLAN/TRANSPORT: *Before Departure:*

SkyScanner  
Kayak  
Rome2rio  
PackPoint  
Travisa Visa (info. on Visa  
Requirements)

### *While Traveling:*

Tripit  
Flightview  
Air BnB  
Hostelworld

### EXPERIENCE:

Foursquare  
SitOrSquat (find the nearest toilet)  
UNESCO World Heritage Sites (\$)  
AccuWeather

### HEALTH & FITNESS:

MyFitnessPal  
Prema-Yoga  
RunGo

### MEDICAL:

Travel Health Guide (\$)  
MediBabble (medical translation)

### PHOTOGRAPH, DOCUMENT, & RECORD:

Instagram  
Day One  
BonJournal

# DOCUMENTS

## Passports

A passport is an official identification document issued by governments to their own citizens. If you are a U.S. citizen, you have two options for obtaining a passport. 1) If you are traveling within 14 days, call the Passport Agency located closest to your home residence, to schedule an appointment. 2) If you are not traveling within 14 days, you should apply at one of the designated acceptance facilities. A full list can be found at <http://travel.state.gov>. You should bring with you:

1. Proof of U.S. citizenship (birth certificate, previous U.S. passport or naturalization certificate).
2. Valid identification (driver's license).
3. Proof of travel within 14 days, if applicable (airline ticket, confirmed airline-generated itinerary).
4. Two identical photographs (2x2 inches in size).
5. Completed passport application and appropriate fees.

If you are renewing by mail, your old passport will serve as both proof of citizenship and identification; do not forget to enclose it with your application. Check [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) for current fees and procedures.

Some countries will require that your passport maintain validity for at least six months from the day you enter the foreign country. If your passport will expire in less than six months from your date of departure, you should renew your passport to be on the safe side.

It is important to remember that your passport is your most important legal document while you are outside of the U.S. In some countries, it is required that aliens carry their passports at all times. Be sure to guard it carefully and make photocopies of it. **Do not travel away from your study abroad site, and particularly away from your host country, without your passport.**

## Visas/Entry Documents

A visa is official permission granted by the authorities of the country where you will study or travel which allows you to enter and remain in that country. Many countries require visas to enter even as a tourist, so check ahead. Visas are not usually required for U.S. citizens for tourism in Western European countries, but there are frequently different regulations concerning study and work. A student visa is required to enter most of the countries in which WC sponsors study abroad. If you are going abroad to work, volunteer, or do an internship, you are also likely to be required to obtain a visa. The visa itself is frequently a stamp in your passport, not a separate document. Visas are issued at the country's embassy in the U.S. or at consulates located in major U.S. cities. It is imperative that you fully complete all documents and submit them exactly according to instructions. You will work with the appropriate embassy or consulate that serves your legal residence here in the U.S. **Be aware of how much time it takes to get a visa for the country to which you are going.**

In some cases even though a visa may not be required, appropriate acceptance letters and financial documentation are required for entry into the country. The Assistant Director for the Global Education Office (GEO) will provide you with instructions concerning what documents will be needed in the mandatory Pre-Departure Workshops. You will be required to submit your official acceptance letter from the host university and the confirmation of enrollment letter from WC with the visa application to the program. **Safely save your acceptance letters until needed.** Customs might ask for these documents when you enter the country.

If you plan to travel outside of your host country, you may need visas; check requirements with the consulates of specific countries.



## **Documents for Non-U.S. Citizens**

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you should consult the nearest consulate of the country of your citizenship and the nearest consulate of the country where you plan to study. The procedures that you will follow are different from those for U.S. citizens. It is important to initiate this process as soon as possible in order to assemble documents and allow time for lengthy procedures. U.S. permanent residents must check with the U.S. Immigration Service concerning regulations for reentry into the U.S. It is particularly important to verify procedures for those who contemplate being outside the U.S. for more than one year. Non-U.S. citizens should also check to see if a transit visa is required for the countries they pass through on the way to their ultimate destination.

International students must see a SEVIS official and obtain a travel signature on visa documents (I-20) to permit re-entry to the U.S. International students should also plan ahead to obtain any necessary visas for countries in which they plan to travel.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

### **General**

All students should have a complete physical checkup, have their eyes checked, and take care of any dental problems that might flare up while away from home for a semester or an entire year prior to departure. For obvious reasons, it is best to do as much preventive health maintenance as possible before leaving for an unfamiliar environment.

### **Prescriptions**

Medications and prescriptions are available around the world. That said, if you are planning to study abroad for 1 semester, you are encouraged to speak with your physician about the possibility of taking enough medication with you for the entirety of your stay. If you plan to stay abroad for an academic year or are on medications that cannot be distributed all at once, then you should do research on accessing the medication in your host country. You should also verify with a local physician or your family doctor what kinds of medications are available in your particular country that would serve as generic substitutes for your regular prescriptions. You should always carry a doctor's note attesting to the prescription; this is especially true for medications that are also identified as narcotics. Keep all medications in their original packaging. Seek advice from Student Health Services about how to get permission from your insurance company to fill a prescription for a semester or year abroad.

### **Medical Records**

If you have pre-existing medical conditions, have your doctor summarize them in a note. If your medical condition is complicated in any way, a copy of recent test results can be invaluable to a treating physician overseas, for example, a copy of a recent EKG, an x-ray report or blood tests. If you have a pre-existing medical condition that is potentially life threatening or could put you at a high risk while abroad, consider wearing a medical ID bracelet. A medical ID is jewelry that could save your life. Medical conditions, drug and food allergies, prescribed medicines and emergency contacts can be engraved onto the surface of a medical ID bracelet or necklace to help responders more effectively care for you in case of an emergency.

## **Mental Health Abroad**

Everyone has ups and downs, and studying in another country can often make these highs and lows more pronounced. Most of the time the low periods are caused by *Culture Shock* and the stress of trying to adjust to another culture without your usual supports. Sometimes, however, these stresses can be compounded by class work, personal relationships and other outside pressures which leave students feeling completely overwhelmed. Most students will miss the comforts and conveniences of home, no matter where the study site. However, if this begins to affect your relationships, your grades and/or your daily life, you need to talk to someone. If you are feeling lost, overwhelmed, or depressed, and nothing seems to be helping, you should seek counseling or psychiatric help. There are a few different ways you can do this. You can seek psychiatric counseling in your host country, either by means of your host-institution's Counseling Services, which are often free for students, or via private counseling in your host-country. You can also contact Health Services and Counseling here on WAC campus (if possible you may want to e-mail ahead to schedule a phone conversation).

Washington College also partners with Mantra Health ([app.mantrahealth.com](http://app.mantrahealth.com)), an organization that specializes in providing mental health care to students studying abroad. Because Washington College's counselors cannot *regularly* practice outside of Maryland due to licensing restrictions, Mantra Health's services offer a solution for long-term, regular counseling for students abroad. Students received information about how to utilize the College's tele-counseling services in their mandatory Pre-Departure Workshops.

Immediate things you can do to help alleviate culture shock and stress are:

- EXERCISE – get the endorphins going!
- Get out of your room – change of scenery!
- Go spend time in a café, park, student union or other space you are surrounded by people!
- Set achievable goals for yourself to accomplish – it feels good to pat yourself on the back for taking public transport, reading a newspaper in a new language, or trying a new food.
- Establish set amounts of time you spend on social media or chat platforms with friends and family at home. Spending all your time communicating with people at home will impede your ability to make new friends and connections at your host university!

## **Overseas Injections**

Here in the U.S., we may take for granted disposable equipment such as needles and syringes. Be advised that some foreign countries will reuse even disposable equipment. In some countries, if injections are required, you can buy needles and syringes and bring them to the hospital for your own use. Avoid injections unless absolutely necessary. If injections are required, make sure the needles and syringes come straight from a package or have been sterilized with chemicals or by boiling for twenty minutes. When in doubt, ask to see how the equipment has been sterilized. Caution regarding instrument sterilization applies to all instruments that pierce the skin, including acupuncture, tattooing, ear piercing, and dental work.

The Center for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) recommends that diabetics or other persons who require routine or frequent injections should carry a supply of syringes and needles sufficient to last their stay abroad. It is not uncommon to do this; however, be aware that carrying needles and syringes without a prescription may be illegal in some countries. Make sure you carry a letter from your doctor explaining the need.

## **Food and Water**

In areas where chlorinated tap water is not available, or where hygiene and sanitation are poor, travelers are advised to drink only beverages made with boiled water, such as coffee and tea, or canned or bottled beverages, preferably carbonated.

Where water may be contaminated, ice (or containers for drinking) should also be considered contaminated. It is generally safer to drink directly from a can or bottle than from a questionable

container. Wet cans or bottles should, however, be dried before being opened, and surfaces that come into direct contact with the mouth should first be wiped clean.

Should you find yourself feeling sick either from food poisoning or water contamination, you can try to re-balance the pH in your stomach by mixing 1/4 tsp. of baking soda in half a glass of water. A tablespoon of apple cider vinegar accomplishes the same effect, despite the strong taste. Vinegar, although it is acidic can affect you as though it were alkaline and can help maintain your pH upward or downward. This makes your stomach a less desirable place for bad bacteria to remain.

Food should be selected with care to avoid illness. In areas of the world where hygiene and sanitation are poor, we advise you to avoid unpasteurized milk and milk products, such as cheese, and eat only fruit that has been peeled personally by the traveler. Note that if you *do* decide to purchase milk from a milkman or private seller in many developing regions, it is necessary to boil the milk yourself as it is most likely unpasteurized.

Since the organisms that cause diarrhea usually come from contaminated food or water, you should take precautionary measures to give yourself the greatest chance of avoiding serious intestinal infections. *Culturelle* capsules can promote positive gut health to manage the new influx of bacteria and organisms to your body. However, even when people follow these general guidelines for prevention, they may still develop diarrhea. Most cases of diarrhea are self-limiting and require only a simple replacement of fluids and salts lost in diarrheal stools. Fluids that are readily available, such as canned fruit juices, hot tea, or carbonated drinks, may be used. Travelers may prepare their own fruit juice from fresh fruit. Iced drinks and non-carbonated bottled fluids made from water of uncertain quality should be avoided. Medications such as *Imodium* should only be used if you are traveling and do not have access to toilet facilities. Your travel medicine office may also prescribe an antibiotic to take with you, depending on where you plan to travel.

We strongly recommend that you consult a physician, rather than attempt self-medication, if your condition is severe, does not resolve itself within several days, if there is blood and/or mucus in the stool, if fever occurs with shaking chills, or if there is persistent diarrhea with dehydration.

## Personal Safety

- Don't stand out: while "safety in numbers" is a good rule to follow, traveling as an identifiable American group of students will attract attention and possibly cause problems. Try to fit in with the surroundings and be "invisible."
- Whenever possible, speak in the local language.
- If possible, have a data plan for your phone or a SIM card. Highly consider buying a portable charger before you travel.
- Report suspicious events immediately: contact the study abroad coordinator/resident director at your study abroad campus if you observe suspicious persons within the premises of your educational environment. Act similarly if anything might indicate threats or an actual terrorist attack on the premises or on student activities.
- Careless talk: do not be free with information about other students. Be wary of new people who might be looking for a way to scam you. People who fall into this category are known as "professional friends". Do not give out your or anyone else's address or telephone number to strangers. Do not give away your class or field trip schedule.
- Official contact: your resident advisor may have an agreement with you as far as leaving the campus site and staying with others. It can't hurt to let your advisor know if you will be staying overnight somewhere else, especially in case of an emergency. Out of country travel should be reported to GEO via email.
- Enter the phone number, e-mail, and address of the U.S. Embassy of *any* country you travel to into your phone or address book.

## **U.S. State Department's Consular Information Sheets**

The U.S. Department of State publishes, and regularly updates online, consular information sheets for every country of the world. These sheets list such information as the location of the U.S. embassy or consulate in the subject country, unusual currency and entry regulations, health and safety conditions, road conditions and other useful information for travelers. Unlike the travel advisories, the consular information sheets do not advise travelers to avoid a given place, but instead present information in a factual manner so that travelers can make informed decisions concerning travel to a country or region. In extreme circumstances, the Department of State may issue warnings advising travelers to avoid a country or specific area of a country. These can be found at: <http://travel.state.gov>

## **U.S. Embassies and Consulates**

U.S. embassies and consulates generally will only give assistance to U.S. citizens. International students and even U.S. permanent residents will want to contact their country's embassy/consulate in their host country who may also provide the following services: <http://www.usembassy.gov/>

### **Legal Advice**

If your passport is lost or stolen, notify local authorities and the embassy at once. After an investigation determining identification, the embassy will issue you a three-month temporary passport.

If you are arrested and/or detained abroad, a consular official can visit you, inform you of your legal rights, and provide you with a list of reliable local attorneys and physicians. The consular officer protests, both orally and in writing, any violations of your legal or human rights. They will visit you as often as needed during the pretrial period and at regular intervals thereafter. They also provide humanitarian assistance—for example, insisting that you receive needed medical and dental care and adequate food and clothing. Finally, a consular official tries to ensure equal treatment under national laws during all phases of the legal proceedings against you.

A consular officer cannot provide certain services: they CANNOT post bail, give legal advice or recommend a specific foreign lawyer, “spring” a U.S. citizen from jail, or interfere in your relationship with your lawyer. Keep in mind that bail provisions as we know them in the U.S. are rare in other countries. Pretrial detention without bail is quite common. Prison conditions are often deplorable in comparison with conditions in the U.S.

### **Health Problems**

In case of illness or accident, embassy personnel can make sure you are in an approved hospital, check on the fairness of billing procedures and explain your payment options. For smaller problems, the embassies provide lists of English-speaking doctors and dentists in various areas (International SOS can provide this information as well). Remember, adequate health insurance coverage is your responsibility.

### **Money**

While officially prohibited from furnishing cash or loaning money, embassy personnel can suggest possible sources of financial assistance. They may also cable someone back home for money for you and deduct the cost of the cable when your cash arrives.

### **Power of Attorney**

If your signature will be needed for any official or legal documents during your absence, you should arrange for “power of attorney” to be held by an appropriate person to act on your behalf. You can do this by writing out in detail the **specific** duties that the person you choose will execute. Take this to a notary public to have it notarized.

### **The Law Abroad**

Keep in mind that while you are visiting another country you are subject to the laws of that country. Legal protection and personal rights that we take for granted in the U.S. are left behind when you depart. The principle of “innocent until proven guilty” is not necessarily a tenet of legal systems abroad.

### **Penalties for Involvement with Drugs**

Despite repeated warnings, drug arrests and convictions of American citizens are still on the rise. If you are caught with either soft or hard drugs overseas, you are subject to local (**NOT** U.S.) laws. Penalties for possession or trafficking are often the same. If you are arrested, you will find:

- Few countries provide a jury trial.
- Most countries do not accept bail.
- Prisons may lack even minimal comforts—bed, toilet, wash basin.
- Officials may not speak English.
- Physical abuse, confiscation of personal property, degrading or inhumane treatment, and extortion are possible. If convicted, you may face one of the following sentences:
  - ❖ Two to ten years in most countries.
  - ❖ A minimum of six years' hard labor and a stiff fine.

### **Dual Nationality**

Different countries have different laws concerning citizenship. Some countries may claim you as a citizen of their country if you were born there, if one of your parents is a citizen of that country, if you are married to a citizen of that country, or if you are a naturalized U.S. citizen but are still considered a citizen of the country under that country's laws. If any of these apply to your circumstances, be sure to clarify your status with that country's embassy or consulate before you leave. If you want to terminate any such previous citizenship, you will need to consult with the State Department.

### **Office of Overseas Citizens Service**

Should your family need to contact you while you are traveling (e.g. after the program is over), emergency assistance is available through the Citizens' Emergency Center of the Office of Overseas Citizens Services (OCS) operated by the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs, tel: 1-888-407-4747. They can, for example, transmit emergency messages from your family, provide protection in the event of arrest or detention while abroad, transmit emergency funds to destitute nationals when commercial banking facilities are not available, etc. It would be wise for you to register your travel plans with the State Department as well as provide your family with at least a tentative itinerary so that in an emergency, they can give the State Department some idea of where to begin looking for you. *Callers from overseas call: 202-501-4444.*

### **What to do in a Health, Safety or Legal Emergency**

- Contact the Director/International Program Office of your overseas university for assistance and guidance within your host country.
- If a safety and/or legal emergency, contact the Embassy/Consulate in your host country. Overseas Citizen Services: 1-888-407-4747 or 202-501-4444 (from overseas).
- If a medical emergency, contact a local hospital or health clinic immediately. As of November 2012, Wikipedia has a useful overview of emergency numbers worldwide: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency\\_telephone\\_number](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency_telephone_number)
- Call your family and keep them informed. Try to make a game plan for when you follow-up with them, and what you might need them to do to assist.
- Contact GEO at Washington College for assistance; GEO 410-810-7100, Assistant Director for GEO: 410-810-5038 (call Public Safety for assistance at 410-778-7810 after hours).
- If it is a city or country-wide emergency, make sure to check-in with the U.S. Embassy/Consulate, or Embassy/Consulate of your home country.

# INSURANCE

**Health Insurance: You will want to ask how your health insurance will cover you while abroad. Here is a list of questions to ask when reviewing an insurance policy:**

- Will the plan cover hospitalization for accidents and illnesses for the entire period while I'm abroad?(Some policies provided by a parent/guardian's employer may cover medical expenses for brief stays abroad but not for the full term of a study abroad program.)
- Will the plan cover doctor visits and medication prescribed abroad?
- Is there a deductible? If so, how much?
- Is there a dollar limit to the amount of coverage provided?
- What are the procedures for filing a claim for medical expenses abroad? Do I need to pay for expenses up front and then submit receipts to the insurance company for reimbursement? (Make sure that you get full information from your policy about how to arrange for routine treatment, medical emergency procedures, and what is required to pay for or be reimbursed for a claim). What if I don't have enough money to pay cash up front?
- What do I use as proof of international medical coverage (if I need to use the insurance or if the host government requires documentation)?
- If I am not a U.S. citizen, will I be covered by the plan? International students might need to arrange for coverage with a company in their home country. Most policies do not cover international studentstravelling in a country other than the U.S.
- Will this insurance cover me in the U.S. for the insured semester if I decide, for medical or other reasons, to return before the end of the program?

If you see a doctor or require hospital treatment abroad, usually you must pay cash and obtain receipts for which you can be reimbursed in the U.S. A few insurance companies will provide on-site representatives to handle payment and other arrangements, such as emergency evacuation, if deemed necessary. You can compare several insurance policies and pay for them at [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com). The State Department has also compiled a list of insurance providers which can be found on the web at:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/go/health/insurance-providers.html>

## **CHUBB/AXA TRAVEL ASSISTANCE FOR ALL STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN WAC PROGRAM**

All Washington College students are covered by Chubb Travel Assistance Program through the College. This is for **EMERGENCY** purposes only and should not replace a student's health insurance coverage.

What constitutes an emergency? Situations deemed to be a **MEDICAL EMERGENCY** (i.e. collapsed lung, medical dehydration, spinal injury) by the insurance company.

What *doesn't* it cover? Health related matters that are not considered medical emergencies (i.e. broken arm, sinus infections, stitches, bladder infections). It also can be used if your safety is threatened by the sudden occurrence of a political or military event. Below is the information you will need to access the account. Students are also given this information at the mandatory Pre-Departure Workshops and this information is uploaded to the Canvas Page.



## TRAVEL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

For medical referrals, evacuation, repatriation or other services please call:

Travel Assistance Program  
1-855-327-1414 (Toll-Free)  
1-630-694-9764 (Direct Dial)  
+44 2039 015895 UK/FOS  
[medassist-usa@axa-assistance.us](mailto:medassist-usa@axa-assistance.us)

Visit [travelassistance.chubb.com](http://travelassistance.chubb.com) for access to global threat assessments and location based intelligence.

Organization: Washington College  
Policy Number: GLMN04954822A  
Assistance Provider: AXA Assistance USA, Inc.

AXA provides emergency medical and travel services and pre-trip information services. Please call when:

- You require a referral to a hospital or doctor
- You are hospitalized
- You need to be evacuated or repatriated
- You need to guarantee payment for medical expenses
- You experience local communication problems
- Your safety is threatened by the sudden occurrence of a political or military event

## Property Loss/Theft/Trip Cancellation Insurance

We recommend that student travelers should have insurance to cover (at least partially) any loss of money because of trip interruption or cancellation, as well as loss of baggage and personal effects either while traveling or living in residence halls. Note that many homeowner's insurance policies contain a clause about property loss/theft coverage extending worldwide. In addition, students are strongly encouraged to purchase a "rider" or "personal articles floater" itemizing any high-value items with which they are traveling (i.e. laptops, jewelry, etc.).

This extra coverage is inexpensive and will cover the replacement cost of the item, not just the depreciated value. While parents'/guardians' coverage generally extends to a U.S. campus dorm room, it does not extend to study abroad unless there is a special rider or floater. However, with a rider or personal articles floater, the specified items are covered anywhere in the world. Normally, a copy of the police report filed at the time of loss or theft will be required by the insurer before any claim will be considered. Also, advice to obtain insurance against theft of one's possessions is often mentioned in student welfare publications; we, therefore, assume that theft is not an altogether uncommon occurrence, and you would be well-advised to take preventive measures.

## Motor Vehicles and Driving

Individual Country Requirements: You may need a specific driving permit, a road permit, or both. An international driver's permit may suffice for driving. It may be obtained from your local automobile association. In some programs, you might not be permitted to drive a car.

- **Insurance:** Does your car insurance cover you abroad? The U.S. Department of State recommends that you purchase car insurance equivalent to what you carry in the U.S.
- **Safety:** You are 4-18 times more likely to die in a motor vehicle in a foreign country than you are in the U.S., depending on the country. Wear seat belts! Wear helmets on motorcycles or mopeds! We recommend that you *do not* drive while abroad. However, should you rent a car, choose one that weighs 3000 pounds or more. A lighter car puts you more at risk. Be sure the car is in good shape. Try to avoid driving at night. Remember that other countries may not have the Emergency Medical Services systems we have in the U.S.

# TRAVEL PLANS

Students must make their own travel arrangements. Whether you are a seasoned traveler or venturing across the globe for the first time, the information in the following sections will be useful.

## International Flight Arrangements

As a student, you may be eligible for discounts on airfare. There are many variables that can affect the cost of your trip, including the season in which you wish to fly, the airline you choose, the length of stay, the flexibility of the ticket regarding date changes and validity, whether you depart on a weekend and how far in advance you purchase your ticket.

Below are some questions to consider as you make your flight reservation:

- 1) How long is the ticket valid for? Ideally it will be valid for 1 year from the date of departure to ensure maximum flexibility.
- 2) Can I change the dates on the ticket and what is the penalty? Is there a certain date by which I must request the change (e.g.: 8 days before original date of departure, etc...)? Most tickets allow date changes; however, you may incur a financial penalty ranging from \$100 to \$500. It pays to find out in advance. As a general rule, date changes must be requested at least 24 to 48 hours prior to the originally scheduled date of travel.
- 3) Can I change the routing on the ticket and what is the penalty? Allowable routing changes are perfect if your plans change while traveling and you now want to leave from Rome instead of Paris on the way home. The sooner you make a change, the less likely there will be a fare difference.
- 4) Is my ticket fully/partially refundable and what are the penalties? If your plans change at the last minute, it pays to have a refundable ticket. If you have only used half the ticket, it is also good to know if the unused portion is refundable; usually it is not.

The best way to find out about your many options is to shop around online or through a travel agent who keeps abreast of airfare changes and who is committed to saving the passenger money. No matter where you fly, planning ahead will save you the most money and, especially around the holidays and spring break, help guarantee that you get the flight you want.

## Getting to the Airport

Confirm your flight status before proceeding to the airport by contacting the airline directly or online. Some airlines, such as Air India, require that you call to confirm your reservation 48-72 hours in advance and some airlines will allow you to "check-in" online 24 hours before departure. Customers are encouraged to arrive at the airport at least 1.5 hours before scheduled departure for domestic flights, and at least 3 hours before international flights. During high seasons, plan to add an hour to each of these arrival times. Be sure to confirm both outbound and return flights; flights can be canceled or changed at any time, and your travel agent may never get the information or may not be able to reach you in time.

## At the Security Checkpoint

Access beyond security is restricted to ticketed passengers and employees only. Have your ticket paperwork available along with your passport. Check out the TSA website for an exact overview of what you can carry on the plane with you, and what will need to be stowed: <http://www.tsa.gov>.



## **Luggage**

When packing, keep in mind that airlines have limits on the amount and weight of your suitcases. Limits may differ by airline, but in general you will be allowed:

- One or two checked bags, each one no more than 50 pounds and no more than 62 inches in circumference (total of length, width and height). Airlines will charge extra for overweight bags. Check with your airline for exact details on what you can take with you.
- A carry-on piece, which must fit in the overhead rack or under the seat in front of you.
- Be aware that weight limits on luggage may be even less when connecting to flights originating in foreign countries.
- Fees for checked luggage and overweight bags differ by airline. Make sure you check with your airline regarding how many bags they allow and any charges for overweight luggage. Excess baggage requests should be made at least 72 hours prior to the flight to ensure that all baggage arrives together.
- To make things easier you may want to look at “Tips for Packing” later in this section.

## **Jet Lag**

Try to relax and save energy on your long flights. You have probably heard of “jet lag,” which is both a physical and a psychological phenomenon. Your body’s physiological clock, through long years of habit, is acclimated to functioning in accordance with a particular daily cycle. When you arrive at your study abroad location, that clock will be automatically out-of-sync with the local cycle because of the time difference. It will take your body a few days to adjust (some bodies take longer than others), during which time you can expect to feel quite tired and run down; you may even feel “spacey” or disoriented. Be prepared for that during the first couple of days; it is a perfectly normal reaction. Try not to nap if you arrive during the daytime. Physical activity, a shower, and fresh air are all things which will help you in your first couple days as you adjust and get on a normal sleep schedule immediately. Also, try to go to sleep at a normal hour (according to your new time zone) the first night you arrive.

## **In-Flight Health**

You can reduce the effects of jet lag and general wear and tear by taking care of yourself 48 hours before your flight. Limit or eliminate the consumption of foods which are high in salt and fat. Increase your water intake and eliminate your alcohol intake. Get a good night’s sleep before you fly. For your flight, bring hydrating foods like apples and oranges and protein-rich foods. Don’t be seduced by the in-flight beverage cart; consuming alcohol in-flight will quickly dehydrate you and make your travel and recovery more difficult. Most importantly, be sure to stay well-hydrated while flying! Most airlines keep a pitcher of water and cups near the restrooms for passengers to use throughout the flight.

## **Airport Immigration**

Upon arrival, you will go through immigration. This will occur either before or after you have collected your luggage. Be sure to carry your passport and any other documents that you have been told you will need for immigration in your carry-on luggage.

Remember that admission to the country is entirely at the discretion of the immigration officer; it is useful to be polite and to dress neatly. The interviewing immigration officer, who determines the length of stay to be authorized and stamped into your passport, will ask you how long you plan to remain in the country.

## **Arranging Temporary Accommodation**

If you will be living in college or university accommodations, you will be notified in advance of the date when your room can be occupied and its location. If you intend to arrive earlier than the date of occupancy, then you should make temporary housing arrangements before leaving home.

## **Luggage Storage**

If you wish to store your luggage in order to travel before the program starts, you may be able to check-it at an airport or train station. Be sure to check whether this is a possibility. Storing luggage at the program site is generally not possible.

## **Tips for Packing**

The best advice is to travel light. For your emotional comfort, you may want to pack one or two items you feel are personal necessities, but by and large, you will find excessive amounts of clothing, gadgets and books to be an unnecessary burden. For bulky clothing items, take only the essential coats and sweaters that are appropriate for the climate.

Use the list on the following page as a guideline (perhaps make your own checklist), and pick and choose what is essential for you. Be sure to consult the specific information provided for your abroad site as well as recommendations from former participants.

North American electrical appliances will usually be of no use to you without a converter. For example, the standard electric current in Europe is 220 volt/50 cycle, whereas North American electrical appliances you may be taking along (e.g., hair dryers, razors) are usually made for 120 volt/60 cycle. Be sure to determine what the voltage will be in your country of study, as well as the size and configuration of the electric wall sockets so that you have the correct adapter.

Do not take expensive jewelry or luxury items which would mark you as a worthwhile target for a casual thief or pickpocket. Carry your airline tickets, travel documents, credit cards, and cash in a money belt or neck pouch while traveling. Make sure that your carry-on bag is well stocked for an overnight stay on the plane.

## PACKING TIPS:

### What to Pack

Check with prior travelers to see what can be purchased (and at what cost) locally.

#### Clothing

- 1 pair of rainproof walking shoes
- 1 pair of flip-flops (for showers)
- Socks
- Underwear
- Shorts (may not be appropriate in certain cultures)
- 1 bathing suit
- 1 hat
- 1-2 nice outfits
- Winter coat, gloves, hat (depending on location)
- Skirts/trousers
- Shirts
- Sweater/sweatshirt
- Poncho/rain jacket
- 1 light jacket

#### Gift Suggestions for host families/hosts

- Baseball caps
- Calendars with U.S. scenery
- Handmade crafts or jewelry
- Clothing/items with university logo
- Cookbooks with American recipes
- Non-perishable foods

#### Miscellaneous

- Adapter and voltage converter
- Portable phone charger
- Watch
- Camera and extra memory card (or film)
- Swiss army knife (in checked luggage only)
- Flashlight
- Journal
- Guides, maps, train schedules, Handbooks (either digital or paper copies)
- Umbrella or raincoat

- Day/small pack (like a book-bag)
- Plastic storage bags
- Hostel sleep-sack (folded-over sheet hemmed up the side)
- Sewing kit (in checked luggage only)
- Change purse
- Luggage lock/tags
- Battery operated alarm clock
- Batteries
- Music
- Small locks for backpack or locking luggage to overhead train racks
- Towel/washcloth

#### Medicine and Toiletries

- Prescription Medicine (& carry a copy of the prescription)
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Travel-size soap and shampoo (can buy full-size shampoos and soaps abroad)
- Comb and/or brush
- Sunscreen, moisturizers, cosmetics
- Deodorant
- First aid kit
- Contraceptives and condoms
- Aspirin/Tylenol/Ibuprofen products
- Tissues
- Tampons/pads
- Razors/blades
- Extra eyeglasses and sunglasses
- Extra contact lenses and cleaning solution
- Tweezers, nail files
- Scissors (in checked luggage only)

#### Documents

- Passport and visa(s) + photocopies
- Tickets and rail passes
- Student ID card, driver's license
- Hostel membership card (if desired)
- Money belt or neck wallet
- Cash, credit cards, calling cards
- Copies of the above for reporting lost or stolen cards

## Local Transportation

The best way to learn about a city is to walk. A year spent walking the streets of a city will give you knowledge of the physical layout of the city and an understanding of the life of its people. Remember to watch the traffic lanes and patterns carefully at street crossings. In some countries, vehicles travel in the left lane as opposed to the right lane. Make sure to seek advice about where it may not be safe to walk and whether it is safe to walk alone. As you would in the United States, use caution when exploring new areas and utilizing alternative means of transportation, such as taxis, the underground/metro or buses and trust your instincts. As a matter of safety, it is always wise not to listen to music or podcasts when walking in an unfamiliar area (this applies when you are outside running or exercising as well). Be cautious of carrying a phone in a manner where it can easily be grabbed or stolen.

## Rail Passes, Cheap Flights and Buses

*RyanAir, a budget airline, is quite popular in Europe.* If your railway plans are restricted to Europe, you should consider one of the many Eurail pass options. With all Eurail passes, you can avoid lengthy ticket lines at stations, just hop on the train and go! They must be bought here and validated in Europe within six months of purchase, so buy yours within that time frame. Be aware, *even with a Eurail pass, surcharges apply for some of the high-speed trains, the sleeper trains and any local seat reservation.* All overnight trains require reservations, and you may want to make reservations during the holidays or summertime. All surcharges are paid locally.

In other countries such as Australia, Hong Kong, Morocco, South Africa, South Korea, Japan, and South America, cheap flights, regional trains, and buses are many times the way to travel. Once in country, explore the International Student Office at your institution for information on discount travel for students.

## Accommodation Options: Youth Hostels

*Note: Also check out pensions (inexpensive hotels). For prices similar to hostels, you may get more amenities.*

Youth hostels are often a cheap and reliable option when traveling. Generally, hostels provide meals or cooking facilities and are much sought after, so it is advisable to book in advance. The YWCA and YMCA both have hostels. If you want to have access to Hostelling International (HI) hostels, you must first become a member which you can do by contacting Hostelling International- USA, <http://www.hiusa.org>. Always read reviews of hostels, and hotels, prior to making reservations.

10 Tips for Staying at a Hostel: For first-time hostellers, the thought of staying in a hostel tends to be very intimidating. You'll inevitably have some anxieties about what it'll be like, but if you've picked a good hostel and take our tips into consideration, chances are you'll have the time of your life.

1. Get to know the place: Put your stuff in your room and take a minute to take in your surroundings. Is the bed comfortable? Are there other people in your room? Walk around the hostel and get to know the common areas – you will likely find it to be a very relaxed and calm environment.
2. Choose your room wisely: Co-ed or single sex? Female travelers, especially those traveling alone, might want to pick a hostel with female-only rooms. They're usually cleaner and quieter. However, co-ed rooms tend to be a lot of fun and you will meet and bond with other people much faster.

3. Pick a bottom bunk: When you pick or are assigned a bed, try to get a bottom bunk. They're much easier to get in and out of and provide a more comfortable space for you to settle into. Plus nobody wants to go upstairs after a few beers!
4. Take a sleep sheet: A sleep sheet is two sheets sewn together to make a self-contained sleep sack – most people have used a double sheet and simply sewed up the bottom. Most hostels provide bed linens, and some will even rent you a sleep sheet, but it certainly doesn't hurt to be prepared.
5. Bring the extras: Towels, soap and shampoo are usually not offered in hostels, so carry these things with you when traveling or call ahead to find out. Also, remember most bathroom facilities are shared – if you've ever showered in a dormitory, you'll remember that flip flops for the shower are a must have. You'll be happy you have them.
6. Bring earplugs
7. Dress in layers: Even though it may be cold when you go to bed, it's amazing how much heat a room-full of people can generate just from their bodies, so dress in layers when you go to sleep.
8. Valuables: Do you leave your money, passport and other valuables lying around in your private room? I didn't think so. So, the same applies here – if the hostel offers a locker or a safe, use it.
9. Don't be shy! You will usually always find people talking, reading, or checking their emails. Most hostelers are more than happy to have a stranger join their conversation, so don't be shy. Introduce yourself and share something about your travel plans. Hostels are the best places to meet other people, make friends and share valuable travel tips.
10. Relax and enjoy the ride! In general, backpackers and budget travelers are a decent trustworthy bunch, so just relax, get to know people, have fun and enjoy the ride!

## HOST INSTITUTION PROCEDURES WHILE ABROAD

Once accepted by your host institution, the personnel in their International Education Office will be your go-to individuals for programmatic support and information. Each institution handles course registration, housing assignments, and billing/fees differently. Questions involving the aforementioned issues are typically found on your host institution's website. From WAC's Global Education website or Canvas Page, you can link to your host institution's website. Once there, use the *Search* function to look for information. If that is not working, try doing a general Google search. For example:

- How do I pay my bill at Royal Holloway?
  - Google: Royal Holloway and payment
- How do I register for housing at Bogazici University?
  - Google: Bogazici University and housing and international students.

### Keywords used internationally:

- Housing = Accommodations
- Bills = Fees and Payment
- Courses/Classes = Modules or Units
- Departments = Faculties
- Class Schedule = Timetable

### *Course Registration at Host Institution*

Most partner universities ask you to indicate courses that you are *interested* in taking while studying at their institution. Unfortunately, they are not guaranteed. Many institutions require you to register upon arrival. If there are courses that you need towards your major, you need to *respectfully* advocate for yourself. Advocating for yourself means explaining why a certain course is required in a calm and collected manner. The Assistant Director for Study Abroad at the Global Education Office can assist if you are having difficulty getting a class you *need* (not *want*) but there is no guarantee. Going over with more classes approved than needed is essential.

At some institutions, your full course load may be fewer than 4 classes. At other institutions it may be more than 4 classes. Make sure you understand the grade and credit transfer system at your host institution (this information is available on your specific institution's page on the Canvas site).

## *Housing & Accommodations*

“I have to share a room with another person?” “I have to share a communal bathroom with the opposite sex?” These are questions asked by international exchange students studying at Washington College. You may likewise be initially shocked by the accommodations provided by your host institution. Adjusting to and acclimatizing to the housing is all part of the adjustment process.

Housing in Europe especially is scarce and if your program does not guarantee housing, be proactive and do not put off your application for housing!

Specific questions about housing at your host institution should be directed to their housing or international office (for host family stays). If your institution allows you to live in independent off-campus arrangements, keep all variables in mind: does your new roommate/flatmate smoke? Is it a single-gendered apartment? Here are a few things about housing abroad that have stuck out to other students:

- Having a 30 minute+ commute to campus.
- Having wardens instead of resident advisors.
- Having a sink in your dorm room.
- Being housed with first year students.
- Having to pay an extra fee for air conditioning, or no AC available.
- Not having a central dining hall or meal plan.
- Having to cook for yourself (every day).

# WASHINGTON COLLEGE PROCEDURES WHILE ABROAD

## Credit and Grade Transfer

Study abroad participants will receive WAC credit when they return from foreign study. You must complete the *Course Approval Form* to obtain pre-approval of your proposed coursework at your host institution. Pre-approval of coursework ensures that the Registrar will post the appropriate WAC course numbers and credit values to your academic record as soon as an official transcript is received from the foreign institution. You must complete this form prior to departure to guarantee credit transfer. Failure to obtain all equivalences on this sheet prior to departure, including possible alternate courses, will delay posting of your credits and grades upon your return.

**If your course schedule changes while abroad**, you must immediately send an email to the relevant Department Chair(s) at Washington College to have additional courses approved. Make sure to carbon copy (CC) your faculty advisor, the Registrar and the Assistant Director for Study Abroad at GEO on all correspondence.

***Transfer of credit upon return:*** Many partner institutions do not release grades and transcripts for several months following the semester. It can take up to 5 months for grades and credits to be posted to your WAC transcript. Please make sure you have submitted any required transcript release prior to leaving your host institution, and put in a request if you would like an additional transcript sent directly to you; you may want one if you plan to apply to graduate school or a professional program following graduation. Washington College's Registrar can only accept original transcripts directly from your host institution or from the Global Education Office.

## Class Registration for the Following Semester While Abroad

If you are returning to Washington College the semester following your study abroad experience, you will register online with your class. Make sure to contact your academic advisor and review what courses you plan to take and need to take towards your degree. You will register at the assigned time for your class, in the Eastern time zone (EST or EDT depending on the time of year). If registering at your assigned time is problematic, the Registrar's Office can assist. Make sure to e-mail the Registrar's Office *at least 2 business days in advance of your assigned time*: [registrar@washcoll.edu](mailto:registrar@washcoll.edu). If you are going to another study abroad location for your second semester abroad, then you will register for classes at Washington College as though you were returning in case something happens to cancel your second term abroad; once WAC classes start in your second semester, GEO will contact the Registrar's Office and have them replace those WAC classes with ADM 003, the study abroad placeholder.

## Student Resources & Conduct While Abroad

While abroad, you are still member of the Washington College community. You still have access to online library resources, you can set-up counseling appointments by phone, and you can still seek assistance from any on-campus office or faculty member. As you are still a member of the community, the College holds you to the same student conduct standards outlined in the [Washington College Student Handbook](#) and *Washington College Catalog* and the Washington College Honor Code. Please keep this in mind when making decisions about how to conduct yourself while at your host institution.

## Global Education Office

The Global Education Office remains a resource to you while you are abroad. Please do not hesitate to contact GEO if you need any assistance while abroad.



# MONEY MATTERS

## Banking and Currency Exchange

It will be helpful for you to arrive with some of your host country's currency in various denominations already in your pocket. This will save you the trouble of having to exchange your dollars immediately and will let you pay for local transportation and other incidentals. Foreign currency may be ordered in advance from a local U.S. commercial bank for a small service charge or may be purchased on demand at large U.S. banks in major cities. It is also possible to change money in the airport upon arrival, but the exchange rate is typically lower and may have a commission deducted from the transaction. If you must change money at the airport, try to find an ATM to reduce exchange rate costs.

*Note: Check to see if you are likely to be able to obtain money from a bank machine at the airport upon arrival.*

Pre-paid cards are another way to take money with you. Make sure to inquire how much they charge for cash withdrawal from an ATM, and if/how they provide assistance if your card does not work overseas. Using a pre-paid card is easier in developed countries and major cities.

Most students wait until arrival in the country to establish a bank account (in some countries, if you are abroad for six months or less, it may not be possible to open an account). The reason for this is not only to let you become acquainted with the various banks and the services and incentives they offer to new customers, but also to allow you to familiarize yourself with the different types of bank accounts and find the branch office closest to where you will be during banking hours. Keep in mind that in many countries, banks are neither as convenient nor ubiquitous as they are in the States. Plan ahead and stay on top of your budget.

## Sending Foreign Currency Payments Abroad

In the event that an advance payment is required in a foreign currency (i.e. housing deposit or payment, application fee, etc.) the following methods may be used to convert payments from dollars to the appropriate currency:

- **Wire Transfers.** The bank wires your funds, converted into the foreign currency and based on the exchange rate. You will need the name and address of the overseas bank that will receive the funds and the name and account number of the overseas university. Ask if you will also need that bank's ABA routing number.

## Transferring Money from Home

It is possible to wire money to a Western Union Agency, or possibly a country's post office through Western Union; this service usually takes **two business days**. In addition, Western Union offers a "will call" service that allows you to pick up money at a Western Union office within minutes of receiving an order from the U.S. The sending party can place the order using a credit card and will then receive a money transfer control number to be given to the receiving party. The drawback to the convenience and speed of the "will call" is that it is expensive: it is between \$25 and \$50 to wire any amount under \$500. (See "Credit Cards" section on American Express check writing).

Web Link: <http://www.westernunion.com>

## Credit Cards

Credit cards make foreign currency transactions easy, and they are invaluable in a financial emergency. **If you do take a credit card with you, use it wisely;** because it is easy to overspend, interest charges can be costly, and the loss or theft of a card can inconvenience you, especially while traveling. Check with your bank to see what fees are charged for using your card abroad. Investigate opening an account at a bank that might have a partner bank abroad (e.g. HSBC).

***Be sure to alert the agency that issued your card that you will be using it abroad so that it does not get cancelled because they think it may be stolen!!***

## Bank cards

Check to see that your bank card or credit card has a Plus, Cirrus, Visa, Mastercard, or Eurocard logo. Some North American banks have 5-digit pin numbers, while in Europe 4-digit numbers are more common. Before leaving, check with your bank about arranging for a new pin number if yours is *not* a 4-digit number. Also, the primary account on your bank card must be a checking account, not a savings account, in order for you to be able to withdraw funds. While the exchange rate is excellent when using the ATM, high fees for each transaction can cancel out that benefit. To strike a balance, make a few large withdrawals rather than several small withdrawals.

***Note: Make sure that you notify your bank that you will be living and traveling abroad. Otherwise, they might put a hold on your card because they think it is stolen. Also, be sure to determine what fees your bank will charge for using your card abroad and try to negotiate for a reduction or removal of fees.***

## Budgeting

The overall cost of living abroad can sometimes be higher than at home because you are in an unfamiliar environment and are confronted with an almost endless array of entertainment possibilities and attractions.

Keep in mind that the students with whom you will be studying are all surviving and even enjoying life on possibly limited means. Anything you can learn from your new peers may help you to conserve your own funds. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- Make both weekly and daily budgets and stick to them. Learn the value of the money wherever you are and be consistently alert for special student rates and discounts wherever you go.
- Take advantage of less expensive alternatives wherever possible. Cook for yourself or use refectory meals over restaurant meals and save even moderately priced restaurant outings for special occasions. Unless you are using a collegiate dining service, don't purchase breakfast you can easily prepare for yourself. Always try to take your main meal in the subsidized collegiate refectories. This will leave you with a smaller, less expensive evening meal or snack to purchase or prepare for yourself.
- Plan your entertainment and recreational activities around the availability of free, inexpensive, and discounted events.
- Plan to shop in street markets or major chain supermarkets and avoid specialty shops and convenience stores that add a 20–30% markup. Part of your experience abroad should include learning how to get the best available value for your money. Try to put off making major purchases as long as you can. You may find that you can do without the item; you will at the very least give yourself an opportunity to shop and compare goods and prices.

- If you have an International Student Identification Card (ISIC), use it to take advantage of special rates and discounts on travel, accommodation, entrance fees, and entertainment.
- When you travel, stay in accommodations that fit your budget. This may mean staying in hostels or modest bed-and-breakfast accommodations or inexpensive pensions as opposed to hotels. If available, you may want to purchase a Hostelling International membership card, which is valid for student hostels abroad. But your personal safety is always of the utmost importance. Educate yourself on what are safe options when traveling alone or in a group.
- Take care of your belongings and safeguard your traveler's checks and cash. Losses from carelessness are difficult enough in your home country; they are even more burdensome abroad.
- If you are in Europe, take advantage of the exemptions for overseas visitors, who are not from countries of the European Economic Union, from paying the value-added tax (VAT) on goods, but not on services. The trouble is worthwhile only if you are buying expensive items, and only certain stores participate in the program. Ask the store for a certificate of exportation when you make your purchase (they will need to see your passport) and present the certificate and the goods to the customs officer for validation when you leave the country. You must take the goods out of the country within three months of their purchase. Lines at airports are long, so leave plenty of time. Once you depart, you can claim a refund of the tax from the store by mail—if possible, obtain it in U.S. currency. You cannot reclaim VAT for goods you do not carry out of the country with you. Many stores have “tax exempt” forms available, which can be cashed at the airport after you pass customs.

## **Income Tax Information**

**Attention Year-Abroad and Spring Semester Program Participants:** If you have earnings which require you to file federal and state income tax returns, you must remember that you will be out of the country between January 1 and April 15. Persons temporarily living abroad may normally request an extension on the deadline for filing federal income tax. The extension usually is until June 15. The best advice is to contact the American consulate or embassy in your host country for information on your tax obligations; they may have 1040 tax forms and may even be willing to help you with questions. You can file from abroad if you arrange for your parents to send you the necessary state and federal forms and other documentation.

*Tax forms are also available at <http://www.irs.gov/>*

## **Communications**

### **Laptop Computers**

Students often question whether there will be access to computers while studying abroad, and if not, if they should take along a laptop computer. Talk to past participants who can tell you about their own experiences with computer access and the need for laptops abroad.

E-mail access and free Wi-Fi varies widely from country to country and university to university. Some sites will provide internet access and even e-mail accounts from university computer labs. At this point, most student residences abroad have internet access, but not all do. This is part of the experience adapting to new ways of communicating and studying.

When using laptops abroad, don't forget to check on the voltage as cycles may be different than in the U.S. Be sure to always use a surge protector. For printing your work, your host university will have printing services available, or you can usually find commercial establishments just as you can in the U.S., so you do not need to bring a printer.

When traveling with your computer, follow these safety tips:

- Carry your laptop computer in a nondescript case and carry it with the clasp toward your body.
- Keep your laptop with you at all times; never put it on the seat next to you.
- Don't put your carrying case on the conveyor belt until you are the next person in line to pass through the metal detector and keep a constant eye on your bag as it enters and exits the x-ray machine.
- Use an anti-theft device for laptop computers and get your laptop engraved with an identifying number.
- Always keep your windows and door to your room locked when you are away.
- Lock your laptop to a non-removable piece of furniture in your room.

### **Wireless and Bandwidth**

At your study abroad site and in your residence, you may have limited or no access to certain amenities such as wireless, computer labs, and streaming. Streaming sites such as Netflix do not allow streaming from all countries so you may not be able to access the multi-media entertainment you are accustomed to. If this is the case, ponder the benefits of living in a less technologically oriented society and get out and meet people! You are there to explore a new place and learn from your surroundings.

It is particularly important to remember that the use of e-mail in campus housing or certain areas of the school may not be available at every study abroad site. Rhodes University in South Africa has a bandwidth quota for students studying at the university. Please adhere to all usage requirements at your host institution. If the university or program does not offer computer and e-mail access, you may wish to try and find local cafes with Wi-Fi or internet cafés.

### **CHECK YOUR WASHINGTON COLLEGE EMAIL REGULARLY**

All correspondence regarding class registration, the housing lottery, and other events you need participate in will be sent via your Washington College e-mail. You are expected to check it regularly.

## **Cell Phone Use for Study Abroad**

### **Can you use your US phone?**

Europe and much of the world adopted a common cell phone standard called Global Service for Mobile (GSM). Equally important, Europe, Africa and Asia not only had the foresight to adopt the same cell phone standard, but they also decided that their cell phone networks would operate on the same frequencies (the 900mhz, initially and later the 1800mhz band. This explains why a cell phone that works in London will work equally well in Johannesburg, Beijing and Sydney.

### **Prepaid Phones**

You will probably want to purchase your own GSM cell phone and a local prepaid SIM card for studying abroad. The cost of a prepaid SIM card varies by country.

To learn about your alternative options, you can contact your provider.

### **AT&T**

Has GoPhone options and plans to avoid roaming charges and international fees.

<http://www.att.com/att/global/>

### **Verizon**

Global calling and messaging plans are available.

<http://www.verizonwireless.com/wcms/global/plans-and-pricing.html>

### **T-Mobile**

Global data and texting plans are available. Calling internationally available with fees.

<http://www.t-mobile.com/optional-services/roaming.html>

### **Social Media**

By far the cheapest way to call is through different social media platforms. You have your choice of WhatsApp, Zoom, Facebook, Discord, and others. These means of communication ensure that you can easily stay connected to family and friends back home.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Time Zones

When making phone calls to or from the United States, keep in mind that there is a time difference. Check the world clock on your phone.

### Public Holidays

Be sure to learn what the public holidays are in the countries in which you plan to study or travel. During those days, banks and stores may be closed. You also may find that the daily routine of commerce may be different than in the U.S. In some countries, like Italy, and rural France all businesses close for an hour or two at midday. Public transportation may be limited or not in service during holidays.

### 24-Hour Clock

You will find that all official timetables abroad are based on the 24-hour clock.

On the 24-hour clock, for example, 1:00 p.m. appears as 13:00. **If you simply subtract 12 from all times between 13:00 and 24:00 you will arrive at our standard afternoon and evening times.** Examples: 14:15=2:15 p.m.; 17:30=5:30 p.m.

### Distance

To convert kilometers to miles (as you try to make road signs more meaningful), simply divide the number of kilometers by 8 and multiply the result by 5. Should you wish to convert from miles to kilometers, divide the number of miles by 5 and multiply the result by 8.

### Temperature

Temperature is a bit more difficult; freezing on the centigrade thermometer is 0 and boiling is 100. As you can see, there is a difference from the Fahrenheit thermometer not only in where the scale begins and ends but also in the size of the gradients (degrees) between the bottom and the top of the respective scales. Since temperature abroad will be expressed in centigrade, you will be primarily concerned with conversion from that to Fahrenheit. **The mathematical procedure to convert from centigrade to Fahrenheit is to multiply the number of degrees “C” by 1.8 and add 32.** Should you wish to convert from Fahrenheit to centigrade, you must first subtract 32 from the number of degrees “F” then divide the result by 1.8. Eventually, you should become accustomed to thinking in terms of the metric system. <http://www.metric-conversions.org/temperature/celsius-to-fahrenheit.htm>

**Useful Foreign Currency (Money) Converter:** [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com)

# EXPLORING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

While it is difficult to generalize about cultural differences, it is nevertheless true that every culture has its own distinct characteristics that make it quite different from every other culture. Some of these characteristics can be quite evident, even to the unsophisticated (e.g. language, religion, political organization, etc.); others can be so subtle that while foreign visitors may be vaguely aware of the existence of differences that leave them uncomfortably off-balance, they cannot quite determine the exact nature of those differences.

Culture in the context of this chapter refers to "... an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society" (Kohls, 1996, p. 23). Robert Kohls, Director of Training and Development for the International Communication Agency, expands that definition to say, "culture refers to the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes—its customs, language, material artifacts and shared systems of attitudes and feelings."<sup>3</sup> The latter (i.e., shared systems of attitudes and feelings) is one of those more subtle areas through which the uninitiated treads at his/her own peril. Mr. Kohls also goes on to say that "culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation," thus distinguishing it from the genetic heritage that differentiates one group of people from another.

L. Robert Kohls. *Survival Kit for Overseas Living*, Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc. 1996

## Cultural Stereotypes

Numerous studies have been done to identify specific characteristics that distinguish one culture from another. Unfortunately, attempts to categorize cultural characteristics often end up in cultural stereotypes that are unfair and misleading. In adjusting to your study abroad environment, you will therefore have to deal not only with real cultural differences but also with perceived cultural differences. And keep in mind that people of other cultures are just as adept at stereotyping Americans as we are at stereotyping them—and the results are not always complimentary. The following, for example, are a few of the qualities (some positive, some negative) that others frequently associate with the "typical" American:

outgoing and friendly	disrespectful of authority
informal	racially prejudiced
loud, rude, boastful, immature	ignorant of other countries
hardworking	wealthy
extravagant and wasteful	generous
sure they have all the answers	always in a hurry
lacking in class consciousness	promiscuous

While a stereotype might possess some grain of truth, it is obvious when we consider individual differences that not every American fits the above description. Keep in mind that the same thing is true about your hosts vis-à-vis your own preconceptions.

## Culture Shock

Peter Adler (1975) defines culture shock as "a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture to a new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences..." In one sense, then, culture shock is a form of alienation. In another sense, however, it suggests the attempt to comprehend, survive in, and grow through immersion in a second culture" (Adler, 1975, pp. 13-14). Adler's article "The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock" can be found in *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1975, 15(4), pp. 13-24.

Generally speaking, students experience four stages of cultural adjustment.

1. The honeymoon stage: initial euphoria and excitement about the new and unusual environment. You may experience:
  - a. Excitement about surrounds
  - b. Eagerness to engage in tourist-like activities
  - c. Intrigue with comparing similarities and differences between host country and home
  - d. Interest in learning, motivation, and open-mindedness
2. Culture shock: as the novelty wears off you may feel irritable and hostile. You may experience:
  - a. Feelings that small issues are major catastrophes
  - b. Higher levels of stress
  - c. A focus on the differences of your new culture. Stereotypes and prejudices surface
  - d. Homesickness
3. Gradual adjustment: finding humor and perspective; you decide to make the most of the experience. You may experience:
  - a. Increased familiarity with the culture, its logic, and values
  - b. Periodic highs and lows as adjustment takes place
  - c. Return of sense of humor and recognition that you like many parts of the culture
  - d. Deeper learning about like and a change of perspective
4. Feeling at home: adaptation and biculturalism; you begin to appreciate certain aspect of foreign culture and critique others. You may experience:
  - a. Feeling at home in the new culture
  - b. No longer negatively affected by differences between the host and home cultures
  - c. Living and working to your full potential

There is no simple, clear-cut way of dealing with culture shock. The first step is simply recognizing its existence and your vulnerability to it. As long as you know in advance that you will probably be vulnerable to at least some extent, you can prepare yourself psychologically to accept the discomfort and turn it into an advantage by learning from it. You are not the only one experiencing occasional frustration, irritability, depression, etc. Falling victim to culture shock does not imply the existence of any psychological or emotional shortcomings on your part: as Robert Kohls has said, "... culture shock is in some degree inevitable ..."10 and is "... the occupational hazard of overseas living through which one has to be willing to go in order to have the pleasure of experiencing other countries and cultures in depth."11

Undergoing culture shock is in itself a learning experience that you should take advantage of, for it is a way of sensitizing you to another culture at a level that goes beyond the intellectual and the rational. Just as an athlete cannot get in shape without going through the uncomfortable conditioning stage, so you cannot fully appreciate the cultural differences that exist without first going through the uncomfortable stages of psychological adjustment.

## **Etiquette**

Social customs differ greatly from one country to another. It is therefore impossible to give guidelines that will be applicable in every culture. Generally speaking, you can be yourself as long as you remain friendly, courteous and dignified. Always keep in mind that you are the guest in someone else's country; you would be safe to assume that your behavior should be regulated in the same manner as if you were in someone else's home.

Keep in mind, as mentioned earlier, that the German, the Japanese, the Spanish, etc., have a stereotyped perception of the American, just as the American has a stereotyped image of them. All too often, the stereotype of the American is far from complimentary: the boorish tourist who expects everyone to speak English, the arrogant patriot who thinks every country in the world should pattern itself after the U.S., the drunken reveler who sees the anonymity of traveling abroad as an opportunity to drop all civilized



inhibitions—all have contributed to the development of this unfortunate stereotype. It is up to you to behave in a manner that will convince your hosts that this is indeed an unjustified stereotype that cannot be applied arbitrarily to every American.

After cautioning you against stereotypes and generalizations, it may seem a bit contradictory to suggest that because of the unique social and cultural milieu in the U.S., most Americans tend to be less reserved, less inhibited, and less restrained in their efforts to communicate friendliness and sociability. In some areas abroad, this outgoing manner (especially on the part of young women) can be grossly misinterpreted: a friendly smile and a warm “hello” in some places easily be interpreted by a male as something more than mere friendliness.

**Until you develop a feel for the social customs characteristic of the area in which you are living and studying, it might be wise to be a bit more formal and restrained in your social contacts.** By the same token, do not expect the local populace to welcome you immediately with open arms; their formality and restraint are not necessarily an expression of unfriendliness but may simply be characteristic of their social manner.

In keeping with the relatively more formal manner of social customs abroad, always be conscious of placing much more emphasis on the simple niceties of polite social intercourse. You should be prepared to offer a formal word of greeting to whomever you meet in your day-to-day activities. Should you approach a clerk in the local market in Lyon, for example, always be courteous enough to begin your conversation with, “Bonjour, Madame (Monsieur, Mademoiselle)” before you launch into your inquiries about the products. **You should also become familiar with the appropriate expressions of gratitude in response to your hosts’ hospitality.**

You will probably find that each country has its own particular brand of wit and humor. Few individuals will appreciate the kind of “kidding” that Americans are accustomed to. Comments, even when intended to be humorous, may be taken quite literally.

When it comes to language, most people will be flattered rather than amused at your efforts to communicate in their language. Don’t be intimidated or inhibited in practicing the new language.

Just a couple of words of caution might be in order:

- Avoid slang expressions, which are usually unique to the cultural milieu in which they originate and which may therefore be totally meaningless in the context of another culture.
- Be aware of the differences between the “familiar” and the “polite” forms of address and try to use them properly.
- Don’t try to translate American idiomatic expressions directly into the native language—the words themselves may mean something entirely different and the expression as a whole may be complete nonsense when translated into a language other than that of its origin
- While it is not true that all people speak English, it is true enough for you to be wary of making impolite or tactless comments on the presumption that those within hearing distance will not understand English.

When establishing social relationships, “play it by ear” in determining the level of familiarity that you should adopt at the various stages of your relationship. Physical contact, for example, may **not** be especially appreciated or understood by someone unfamiliar with the American idea of camaraderie; a cheerful pat on the back or a warm hug may be quite embarrassing and uncomfortable. You might also want to let your hosts point the way in the kind of “small talk” in which to engage; while Americans may find it easy and quite appropriate to talk about themselves, your hosts may view that as being as impolite as asking personal questions about them.

**Be extremely sensitive of others' attitudes and feelings when it comes to drinking.** You will probably find that your hosts enjoy social drinking as much as any American, but they might look upon drunkenness as neither amusing nor tolerable. Once again, you may very well encounter an unfortunate stereotype of Americans, such as, Americans are excessive drinkers. In some countries where alcohol is forbidden, this is a serious taboo.

**Haggling over prices can be another sensitive and vague subject.** Haggling is not only appropriate but even expected in some circumstances; the trick for the foreigner is to know under which circumstances that is true. Unless you clearly understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate circumstances for haggling over prices, you may very well find yourself insulting the merchant and further reinforcing their stereotype of the boorish American. Should you have any doubts about the appropriateness of haggling over a price, you can always test the waters by politely indicating that you like the product very much but that it is a bit more than you had anticipated spending; if the merchants wish to bargain further, this will give them the opening needed to offer you the product at a lower price; if it is not that kind of an establishment, you have simply terminated the conversation.

You can expect people abroad to be very articulate and well-informed when it comes to matters of politics and international relations. **Do not be at all surprised if your counterparts in the academic setting try to engage you in political debate.** There is certainly no reason for you to modify your own convictions (unless, of course, the argument presented is convincing enough to prompt such a change), but you should be discreet and certainly rational in your defense of those convictions. Here again you may very well find yourself butting heads with another of those unfortunate stereotypes, such as the arrogant American who thinks everyone must fall in line with the U.S.

Find out what the practices for tipping are in your host country and do so accordingly.

You will probably want to record many of your memories on film, and it can often be helpful to include someone from the local populace in your photographs. **Be extremely tactful and discreet in how you approach photographing strangers; it is always courteous and wise to ask permission before stepping up to someone and snapping a picture.**

**Remember that smoking may be banned or restricted in certain areas and public buildings, including the university, restaurants, shops, theaters, cinemas, and in public transportation.** It is polite to check to see whether it is allowed in somebody's house/room. Be sure to ask permission to smoke. On the other hand, in some environments smoking is more widespread than in the U.S. and may take quite an adjustment for you if you are a non-smoker.

Customs differ from one country and culture to another. It is impossible to make generalizations that can be applicable to every situation. Remember, therefore, that it is not at all inappropriate to inquire politely about local customs and social niceties whenever you are in doubt. Expect things to be different overseas; that, after all, is one of the basic reasons for your participating in a study abroad program— to develop a sensitivity to and appreciation for the people and customs of a totally different culture and way of life. Anyone who goes overseas demanding that everything be the same as that to which (s)he is accustomed in the U.S. will be sorely disappointed and probably better served by remaining at home. Be flexible and receptive in dealing with these differences, and you will find that your own experiential background will have been greatly enriched.

## Lost in Translation

**OK:** You've used this since childhood and probably assume everyone else has, too. But the "OK" gesture—with the thumb and index finger forming a circle—can get ugly abroad. In Russia, Germany, and much of Latin America, it represents a certain part of the body and translates as an emphatic "screw you." In Japan it is a sign for money, as if your fingers were outlining a coin. In France, it signifies "zero" or "worthless." Few use it the way Americans do, so leave it at home.

**V/Peace Sign:** We use the classic two-fingered "V" to signal "victory" or "peace." You may think it's safe since it was popularized by a Brit, Winston Churchill. But, if you're in Britain or Australia and you do it with your palm facing toward you instead of out, you will have found yet another way to say "screw you." Use with extreme caution.

**Whistling:** Americans are an enthusiastic breed, and when we want to applaud something, we often whistle while we clap. Unfortunately, no one else does. In Russia, it is seen as unladylike when done by women, and somewhat "uncultured" in general. In fact, most Europeans whistle as a form of booing. Avoid it, unless you want to do a lot of explaining in public.

**Handshake:** Faster than you can say "cultural imperialism," the rise of global business has spread the handshake to all corners of the world. Even in countries with their own traditional forms of greeting—such as India, where they make a praying motion with their hands, or Japan, where they bow—many locals will accommodate the Western urge to shake hands. The bone-crushing squeeze favored in the U.S. is interpreted as a sign of aggression in many regions, including the Middle East and much of Asia. **Your best bet is to keep it gentle.**

**Nodding:** "But," you insist, "surely some body language must be universal. Basic stuff like nodding your head to say 'yes' and shaking it to say 'no' must work everywhere." Unfortunately, this is not the case. In Bulgaria and parts of the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran, India, Greece and Bengal, the locals actually nod to say "no" and shake their head for "yes."

**Eye contact:** Sometime in your youth, some adult probably drilled into you the idea that people only respect you if you look 'em square in the eye. Saudis would agree (although unrelated men and women often avoid direct eye contact), but not Japanese, Koreans or Thais. To them, staring for any length of time is a major faux pas, as it is for residents of the West Indies and Puerto Rico. If the locals look away while you're talking, they're probably just being polite, maybe even showing respect.

**Personal Space:** You know the feeling. Someone stands a little too close to you, and suddenly you either want to push them away or smack them, or at least take a step back. In general, Westerners are protective of our personal space and don't take kindly to having it violated. The amount of space that people require varies from culture to culture. Stand at what you would consider a normal distance from Chinese or Japanese people, and they will feel crowded. Visit any Latin American or Islamic country, though, and you will find that people stand much closer to each other than we touch-o-phobic Yanks prefer. They may even touch you during a conversation; to them, it's just acting friendly.

The bottom line is that, with the possible exception of the smile, no gesture is safe. If even the most basic body language can betray you, how can you ever hope to fit-in abroad? A preemptive conversation with someone in your host country can't hurt. Just say that you have noticed some differences and ask if there are any others to watch out for. Whoever you ask will, at the very least, be amused. Whatever you do, don't assume.

## Host Families and Student Residences

### Suggestions:

- If possible, get in touch with your host family before arrival.
- Always keep an open mind and observe, observe, observe
- Talk to the family about “rules” within the first few days.
- Spend time with your host family/students in your residence from the start. Some families are going to be more open than others.
- Pictures are a great icebreaker, and lead to great conversations.
- Don’t run up to your room after dinner. Get involved. Stick around and watch TV and chat with the family/students. Ask questions—take an interest in your city/country.
- Try to be as flexible as possible and your anxiety will decrease. Always remember, your family is in the same position as you are.
- Don’t be tense. The first week will seem hard and you may be petrified, but just ask questions no matter how stupid they seem to you.
- Talk openly with family members/students, especially if there is a problem.
- Be conscious of the way your host(s) likes to live and be considerate of that.
- Remember that you are always a guest in your hosts’ home, and treat them with respect.
- Don’t be bothered by first reactions or tone of voice. Inflections in certain languages could seem stern or disapproving.
- Remember that other cultures have different expressions (facial, body) which may seem rude by American standards, but may be perfectly normal in their own culture.
- Avoid conflict. Observe a lot the first few days and try to adapt or fall into the hosts’ way of life (i.e. eating times and habits, sense of humor, etc.).
- Express gratitude when you leave the host family.
- Make promises to stay in touch and keep those promises.

At first, living with a host family may be frustrating and difficult. Once your hosts know you’re interested and really trying to get to know them and the host country, they will help a lot. The student should make the effort. Don’t be afraid to speak another language. After all, that’s probably one of the main reasons you are studying abroad. It is very important to accept corrections and not care that you make mistakes. Try to speak with the family as often as possible.

## Racial and Religious Issues

Racial, ethnic, and religious diversity is not universal throughout the world. Many countries still maintain a rather homogeneous culture in regards to racial, ethnic and religious difference. For students who identify as part of a minority group within the U.S., there are some who have reported feeling exhilarated by being free of the American context of race relations, to those who experienced different degrees of curiosity about their ethnicity and/or religion. Below is text from the website *diversityabroad.com*. They offer some targeted advice on traveling abroad as a minority student, and offer some questions to think about when confronting challenging situations abroad:

“In the U.S. you might be classified by your ethnicity, but abroad, you may be identified first as an American. The people you meet will likely have an opinion about the U.S., and may be eager to tell you what they think, positive or negative.

Whether or not people identify you as an American, they may make assumptions based on your physical appearance. Many people you encounter abroad will show a sincere interest in your culture. There may be people who stare at you or who are eager to touch your hair or your skin. Others may ask insensitive questions about your cultural heritage, physical features, or national origins. If you are abroad in an area where people have had little or no contact with minority students, people tend to be very curious, especially children.

**If somebody says or does something that is offensive to you, try to distinguish between a person who is genuinely curious about you and your culture and someone who has bad intentions.** You may find yourself in some uncomfortable situations, and always remember to put your safety first.

*Must Ask Questions for Minority Students:*

- How is my ethnic group perceived in my host country? What kind of stereotypes are there?
- How should I react if I find something to be offensive?
- Is the person curious or do they have bad intentions?
- Am I used to being part of the majority at home but will be a minority abroad? Or vice versa?
- Will there be other minority students in my program?

*Tips for Minority Students:*

- Remember that people abroad have different cultural norms and tend to be less “politically correct” than people in the U.S.
- Dressing and acting like the locals can make you stand out less, but your skin, hair, or other features may still attract attention.
- Research what kinds of contact and relations your minority group has had in your host country. You may also want to research immigration in general.
- Be aware that people may generalize or incorrectly identify your ethnicity.
- Learn more about other minority students’ experiences abroad. For example, you can talk to other minority students who have studied abroad or find information online.”

The above section is from the website: <http://www.diversityabroad.com/minority-study-abroad>

## **LGBTQ Travelers**

The countries of the world hold very different views on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities. Whereas you might think, “I wish the U.S. was as progressive as Sweden,” the opposite side to that can be true as well. It is important to be aware of the laws pertaining to homosexuality in other countries as well as the general attitudes of the populace toward the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members of their community.

It is important to do preliminary research about your host country and their customs and attitudes. Use these resources to investigate your specific host country.

**INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN AND GAY ASSOCIATION** ([ilga.org](http://ilga.org))

Provides LGBT relevant legal information and news reports by region and country, including an interactive map.

**INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN** (<https://outrightinternational.org/>)

International LGBT campaign which provides information on the legal, social and political climate towards the LGBT community by region and country on its website.

**GLOBALGAYZ.COM**

LGBT travel and culture website that compiles news reports, links, stories and photo galleries for over 190 countries. Though there are many banner ads, the combination of sources allows for a broader picture of cultural attitudes towards the LGBT community in a region than basic legal information.

**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH** ([hrw.org](http://hrw.org))

Compiles reports on human rights issues, including LGBT issues, for countries around the world.



## THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY'S TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS (<http://transequality.org/Issues/travel.html>)

Provides specific travel considerations for transgendered people.

### **Special Note to Women**

In certain study abroad programs, women have had a hard time adjusting to attitudes they encounter abroad and the interactions between men and women, both in public and in private. Some men openly demonstrate their appraisal of women in ways that many women find offensive. It is not uncommon to be honked at, stared at, verbally and loudly approved of, and, in general, to be actively noticed simply for being a woman, and in particular, an American woman. At times, this can become very annoying, and potentially even angering. Indigenous women, who often get the same sort of treatment, have been taught, either explicitly or through experience, how to ignore the attention. Many American students have found hard to do.

American women are seen as liberated in many ways, and sometimes the cultural misunderstandings that come out of that image can lead to difficult and unpleasant experiences. Eye contact between strangers or a smile at someone passing in the street, which is not uncommon in the U.S., may result in unexpected invitations. This leads some women to feel that they are forced to stare intently at the ground when they walk down the street. You will have to learn what the unwritten rules are about what you can and cannot do. Women can provide support for each other; former students suggest that you get together several times early in your stay overseas to talk about what works and what doesn't in regards to dealing with the unwanted attention.

Needless to say, all of this may make male-female friendships more difficult to develop. Be careful about the implicit messages you are communicating, messages you may not intend at all in your own cultural context. Above all, try to maintain the perspective that these challenging and sometimes difficult experiences are part of the growth of cultural understanding which is, all things considered, one of the important reasons you are studying abroad.

### **Keeping a Journal (or a blog)**

There are a number of things that you, as a foreigner, will experience in the course of your travels and studies which may not seem important or may appear to be of only passing interest to you at the time. Initial impressions, your attitude toward people and customs, your view of yourself and your understanding of your place in the world will be undergoing subtle changes. One of the most effective tools for defining your views toward people and events is by keeping a journal. In a journal you can reflect on those events which have been occurring in your life that may or may not be fully making sense. A new custom, for example, of which you have been made aware that doesn't really make sense, may suddenly become understandable when placed beside other seemingly ordinary activities. Writing down those incidents, thoughts, questions, ideas, reflections, will help to put them into context, and will give you a sense of perspective and distance.

There are no formal rules in keeping a journal—it is a personal log of events and your reaction to those events. It is less personal than a diary, more intimate than a mere list or series of photographs of your trip.

Remember that days where nothing extraordinary happened, are important times to sit and reflect on what went before. You may want to include not only incidents but questions you would like answered, places you would like to explore or are interested in knowing more about, stories and poems you may have been inspired to write.

To get started with your journal, take a minute and jot down your reasons for going abroad, and four things you hope to accomplish during your study abroad experience.

**Reasons for Going Abroad:**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Objectives:**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Read through these when you return to the U.S. and see whether or not you met your objectives and if your goals changed while you were abroad.

## COMING HOME

Leaving your new found home abroad and coming back to life in the U.S. is often as confusing a time as going abroad. Below are some important steps and options to keep in mind as you go through the third phase of study abroad. The Global Education Office will work with you upon return to process your experiences, and to help you readjust to life at the College. Make sure to attend any returnee events sponsored by GEO.

### Before You Leave Your Host Country

It's important before you leave for you to realize that you need to take time to say goodbye to your newly-made friends and to the places you have become fond of while studying abroad. There are also some practical things you'll want to remember to take care of, here are just a few:

- Be sure to return all library books.
- Return any room keys.
- Check the condition of your room and ask about any housing deposit charges (please note that some cultures may have different standards in evaluating whether a room is "clean").
- Turn-in all required course work. Do not plan to send course work from the U.S. except in very unusual circumstances. If you do send important documents, send them by express mail and keep copies.
- Pay all bills (accommodation, etc.).
- Bring back all course materials (e.g., reading lists, term papers, journals, etc.). You are likely to need these for the transfer of credit.
- Complete any necessary administrative work required to ensure an official transcript is mailed to Washington College. Most schools will do this automatically, but some schools require students to submit signed paperwork before departing. Check with the staff in your host-university's International Office about this.

### Reverse Culture Shock

Many people say that returning home is even more difficult than going abroad. Students often remark that they feel removed from family and friends who have not had similar experiences. Once again, you can probably expect to go through an initial stage of euphoria and excitement as you are overwhelmed by the sheer joy of being back on home turf. But as you try and settle back into your former routine, you will soon recognize that "your study abroad experience . . . has produced new behaviors, attitudes and values..." and that "these changes often set the returnee apart from the home culture." You have become a new person (after all, that is what education is all about), which means that you can expect a period of disorientation as you adjust to the "new" environment at home.

Engage in Re-Entry events and talk about your experience with the Global Education Office. You'll be amazed how much it can help.



