Study Abroad Handbook

Your guide to studying abroad… before, during and after

Provided by:

COLLEGE of CHARLESTON
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
Dear Student:

Welcome to the journey of a lifetime! We are delighted that you have decided to make study abroad a part of your college experience. Your time abroad will be one of the most exciting times in your life, as well as an educational and maturing experience.

By this point, you have been accepted to a program and are preparing for your departure. We have compiled a guide to aid you as you prepare to depart, to assist you while you are abroad, and to advise you upon your return to the U.S. and to the College of Charleston.

We are available if you have questions or concerns at any point during your international experience. Do not hesitate to contact us if you need assistance.

We would love to hear from you while you are away and invite you to stop by the office upon your return to let us know about your experience. Sharing your experiences will help us learn more about your program and enable us to provide valuable advice to prospective study abroad students.

Until then, have a safe and wonderful time abroad. Make the most out of every day and take lots of pictures!

Again, welcome to the world of study abroad!

Sincerely,

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Before You Go

For a successful and rewarding study abroad experience, the following checklist is provided for your review. It is advisable that you address each of the items before your departure. If you have questions, please contact The Center for International Education (CIE) at 843-953-7661 or visit our website http://international.cofc.edu.

Travel Preparations

☐ Conduct pre-departure research: learn about the culture, current events, modes of transportation, emergency numbers, etc.
☐ Apply for a passport and if necessary, a visa
☐ Make travel arrangements
☐ Plan your finances
☐ Notify your banks/credit card companies about your overseas travel
☐ Arrange medical and dental check-ups
☐ Obtain necessary vaccinations and prescriptions
☐ Make a packing list

At College of Charleston

☐ Complete all application and post-acceptance materials
☐ Keep in contact with the CIE about your study abroad program and any changes
☐ Complete Financial Aid & Power of Attorney forms (if necessary)
☐ Clear debts at the Treasurer’s Office
☐ Clear holds on student account
☐ Notify Housing and Residence Life (if applicable)

Health, Safety, and Documents

☐ Make/scan copies of passport; leave one with family, take at least two with you. You may also want to save a copy electronically.
☐ Read health, safety, and travel recommendations for your host country
☐ Purchase a money belt or neck pouch
☐ Provide family/friend with copies of your itinerary and contact information
☐ Register your travel with the U.S. Department of State’s STEP program: https://step.state.gov/

Contact the CIE with any questions or feedback!
Academics
Remember “study abroad” is first and foremost an educational experience.

Transfer Credit
A copy of your course approval form is available under the “Enrollment Form” section of your AbroadOffice account (cofc.abroadoffice.net). Use this as a reference when finalizing your registration onsite.

If the courses you had pre-approved are unavailable when you arrive on-site, contact your study abroad advisor and the appropriate departmental contact with your new course selection(s). The course approval directory can be found at http://international.cofc.edu/documents/coursedirectory. It is essential that you provide course information/description/syllabus to have the new course(s) approved. In failing to do so, you risk the chance that you may not receive any credit for new classes. Please note that you must get all classes approved, even elective credits.

Receiving Credits
You must earn the equivalent of a U.S. “C” or better to receive credits as awarded by the host institution. You receive transfer credit only; the grades do not affect your CofC GPA.

**NOTE** for students with Life and Fellows Scholarships: Grades earned through U.S. institutions (ex: Butler, Arcadia, UVA etc.) will be factored in to student’s Life and Fellows GPA.

**NOTE** for students with scholarships that require 30 hours for the Academic Year for renewal (Merit, CofC Academic, etc.): Your scholarships will not renew until CIE receives your transcript and the appropriate transfer credit is posted by the Registrar’s Office.

Registration for Semester/Year Abroad
All exchange and affiliate program participants are registered at the College in a special course section for study abroad (ex. INST 200) which is set at 12 credit hours (this is the minimum number required for full-time status). If students earn more than 12 hours on their program, then they will receive credit for the courses they successfully complete. For example, if you take 15 hours and earn at least a “C”, then you will transfer in 15 hours for those approved courses. **It is the responsibility of the student to verify he/she is enrolled in the proper number of credit hours at their host institution, especially if he/she has scholarship obligations.**
Registration for Returning Semester
While abroad, you will register for your returning semester through MyCofC just as you do in Charleston. Therefore, it is important to meet with your major advisor or Academic Advising to determine the courses you need to take.

Your registration entry date can be found at http://registrar.cofc.edu. Be sure to check your registration date, and plan accordingly (internet access will be needed). Consider emailing your academic advisor a couple of weeks before your scheduled registration date in case you have an advising hold.

Remember you can access the CofC catalog and requirements for your major/minor through the web at http://www.cofc.edu/academics as well as general graduation requirements through Degree Works.

REMINDER: Please note that some of the courses that you are taking abroad may be prerequisites for courses you need to take the semester you return to CofC. Because Degree Works will not recognize your current courses until a final transcript has been received and processed, you will need to contact your academic advisor or department chair about registering for your desired courses. Please contact the CIE if you have any problems with the registration process while abroad.

Foreign Schools
In many study abroad programs, you will find that there will be less professorial supervision of your academic work than you are accustomed to in the U.S. This is especially true if you are enrolled directly in a foreign institution. Other educational systems place greater responsibility on out of the classroom studying. Syllabi may be less detailed (if one is provided), more readings may be assigned, often times textbooks are not required and professors may not enforce attendance policies, etc. Often there are fewer assignments and/or tests during the semester and your entire grade can depend on a final exam and/or paper. Therefore, it is important to work consistently throughout the term. Make an effort to familiarize yourself with the educational system of your host country before you go.

Transcripts
All transcripts from study abroad programs should be forwarded to:

Center for International Education
College of Charleston
66 George St.
Charleston, SC 29424
USA
Your transfer credits cannot be posted until the CIE receives your transcript. Please note that transcripts can take up to 90 days to be received from your host university/program.

**Necessary Documents**

**Passports**
As a study abroad student, you will need to possess a valid passport. Passports are valid for ten years if you were at least 18 or older when you received it. Should you need expedited service, additional charges will apply. You can apply for a passport in person at the U.S. Post Office on East Bay Street. The applications and renewal forms for passports are also available in the CIE. You can also visit the U. S. Department of State website for more passport information and to download a passport application [http://travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov).

**Note:** Once you have received your passport, sign it immediately. Otherwise, it is not valid! Sign it in ink and then fill in the information page for emergency contacts. USE A PENCIL to fill this in, as the contact information should always be kept up to date. Make several copies of your passport—take at least 2 with you and leave 1 with your family.

Keep in mind that some countries require your passport to be valid for six months after your visit to that country. There are many countries that have this six-month validity requirement—check with the consulates of the countries you plan to visit.

**Note:** Some countries require non-citizens to carry their passport or other documents on them at all times. Check with the Embassy or Consulate of the host country for more information. A photocopy may suffice in compliance with such a requirement.

**Plane Tickets**
After you have accepted a placement in a study abroad program, you should make arrangements for your transportation overseas. Some programs include airline tickets, while others require you to purchase your own ticket. Find out exactly what your program includes and how you will get to your destination once your plane arrives at the airport (i.e. will there be a bus for students or will you need to find the university on your own?).

Do not wait until the last minute to get your plane tickets, especially for those departures that are in the middle of high season. There are several websites that offer discounted fares for students. Refer to the list of useful websites in the back of this hand-
Visas
Most countries require a student visa before entering their country for an extended stay. A visa is official permission to visit a country allowing you to stay for a certain period of time. This is a crucial aspect of the study abroad experience, so you need to be diligent in your application process. Several months before your departure, contact the consulate for your host country to find out if a visa is required (most countries require a visa if you are staying longer than 90 days). Some requirements, such as a police background check and a doctor’s letter stating good health, can be time consuming and involve pre-planning. Do not wait until the last minute. Visa processing can take up to several months and each country requires specific documents. Please note that some student visas carry certain restrictions (e.g. no employment), and you need a valid passport to apply for a visa. Once you have been accepted by a program, you should begin the visa application process.

Note to Non-U. S. Citizens
Requirements for non-U.S. citizens may vary from those of U.S. citizens. Do not assume that requirements will be the same. Also, check with the CIE to secure necessary documents to return to the U.S.

International Student Identity Card (ISIC)
The ISIC card is useful for students studying abroad. It is recognized worldwide and immediately proves that you are eligible to receive available discounts on travel, accommodations and admission to museums, theaters and other cultural attractions in more than 90 countries. http://www.statravel.com/student-discount-card.htm

Important Preparations
Overseas Addresses
Provide the Center for International Education with your foreign address as well as your email address. This information is helpful in case we need to contact you while you are away.

Gifts
If you are staying with a host family and/or plan to visit friends or family while overseas, it is recommended to bring a small gift—something that would represent the United States or your local community. Some suggested ideas for gifts include the following:
• Cookbooks
• Postcards (of CofC, your home, tourist attractions)
• Small photo books of US or local travel sights
• T-shirts or hats with logos (CofC, sports team)
• Local crafts or artistry

**Taxes**
Don’t forget to have someone take care of them for you! You are responsible for filing taxes while you are overseas. This applies to students going abroad for the academic year or spring semester. For more information, contact the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 or [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

**Change of Address**
Several weeks before going abroad, you will want to consider making address changes for your:
• Credit Cards
• Phone bills and other utility bills
• Rent statements (if applicable)
• Bank statements
• Magazine subscriptions or other memberships
Please be sure to change these addresses several weeks before departure.

**Pre-departure Reading**
It is your responsibility to learn as much as you can about your host country before your arrival. Buy a good guidebook (Lonely Planet or Let’s Go) and/or other resource materials to familiarize yourself with your host culture. The CIE recommends Northwestern University’s page on learning about your destination: [http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/outbound-students/learn-about-your-destination.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/outbound-students/learn-about-your-destination.html).

There are many aspects of a culture that you should learn about, such as:
• Dating customs
• Drinking age
• Acceptable norms
• Appropriate dress
• Social customs (i.e. greeting people with a kiss on the cheek…men and women)
• Meal times (some countries have dinner much later than we are accustomed to in the U.S.)
• Political history
• Educational system
Become familiar with the current events and history for your host country and the U.S. before you go. It does not look good for citizens in your host country to know more about the U.S. than you.

**Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Issues**

Gender roles and diversity practices vary from culture to culture. What we practice in the U.S. may not translate the same into the host culture. Understanding customary norms of the host country before traveling abroad is important for your safety and well-being while abroad.

Women may be exposed to a different set of challenges and safety issues while studying abroad. Being aware of the dangers ahead of time can help you stay safe.

- Learn about gender roles within the host country. American women tend to be more independent and expect the same treatment as men; however, in some cultures, this is not the norm. It can be dangerous for a woman to appear overly independent or assertive. Be aware of the local customs for women and avoid breaking these cultural norms.

- Be aware of the types of dress that women wear in that culture. What may be appropriate in the U.S. may be seen as inappropriate in the host country and attract unwanted attention. Also, be aware of what types of dress are appropriate for certain places, such as religious sites. The expectations may be different for women in such locations.

- Understand the types of compliments that may be given to women in the host culture. Sometimes, whistles and other forms of expression may be used by the host culture as a compliment, but we may perceive this type of communication as harassment. If you feel uncomfortable, walk away and notify your coordinator.

For men and women:

- Relationships between genders may be perceived differently in the host culture. What Americans may consider normal relations may be interpreted differently or in an unfriendly manner in the host country. Understand the local customs about relationships before going abroad. Understand the expressions of friendship and love that you may experience while studying abroad.
Diversity appreciation and acceptance (cultural, racial, religious, sexual, etc.) produces different atmospheres depending on the culture. It may be challenging to understand the new cultural climate in terms of its attitude toward diversity. What we believe in the U.S. may not be perceived in a like manner in another country. Be aware the issues of stereotyping and prejudice may exist in the host culture in ways that are radically different from the U.S. Some suggestions for preparing for unexpected prejudice or racial/ethnic conflict include:

- Being intellectually prepared for it may help you to cope with it. Learn ahead of time about the diversity climate of your host culture. Knowing the norms and issues before you arrive can help you to adjust and prepare accordingly.

- Don’t take racism or prejudice personally. Perceptions and stereotypes are larger than one individual and are not a reflection of you personally. Cultural differences exist and this is a moment for you to reflect upon these differences. Talk to your coordinator or fellow travelers about your feelings.

- Understand that racism is an irrational reaction. Know that you come from a more enlightened background and are able to process racism and prejudice in more effective ways than some individuals in other cultures.

- Take the initiative to educate others about your own ethnic background.

Health
Health Insurance
It is important for you to have sufficient health insurance coverage while you are abroad. Failure to obtain coverage can result in anything from very high medical bills to refusal to be treated in a hospital or doctor’s office. In some countries, foreigners might have to prove they have medical insurance before they can be treated. No matter where you go or what treatment you may seek, SAVE ALL MEDICAL BILLS AND RECEIPTS.

If you are participating in an exchange program, you will be automatically enrolled in medical insurance through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). You will receive an email from CISI confirming your enrollment before your departure. Please see the CIE staff for more details on this coverage.

If you are studying with an affiliate provider, please familiarize yourself with the cover provided by the program. If coverage is not offered, check if your
current medical coverage is valid outside the US. Find out how you would file a claim from abroad and how the insurance company would handle the claim. Ask your insurance company if they provide benefits for medical evacuation and repatriation. Although it is not a pleasant subject to think about, you need to be aware of what would happen if you were to become seriously ill while abroad and had to return to the U.S. for medical treatment. If your current policy doesn’t provide coverage, consider purchasing some form of supplemental insurance coverage. Other questions to ask your insurance carrier:

- Does the policy cover you for all countries you will visit?
- Are there pre-admission requirements, which may not be practical outside the U.S.?
- Does the policy exclude injuries sustained from terrorism and/or acts of war?
- Are the reimbursement procedures appropriate for a student outside the U.S.?
- Will you be required to pay cash in local currency and seek reimbursement later?
- Does the insurance company require claims to be submitted in U.S. dollars?
- What kind of financial and medical documentation will be required, and is such documentation readily available in the host country?

*If you are not currently covered by medical insurance or your current insurance does not cover you while outside the U.S., you are advised to enroll in a policy designed for U.S. students studying abroad.* Information on basic and supplemental medical coverage is available in the CIE.

**Immunizations**

Some countries require proof of immunization from various diseases. In some cases, proof of an HIV test may be required. Since requirements are constantly changing, contact the consulate of the countries you will be visiting for details prior to departure. For more information, call the Center for Disease Control’s Travel Information Hotline at (404) 332-4559 or visit their website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). It is always a good idea to carry a small card with you listing your prior immunizations and medical history. Ask your physician to provide you with a list of shots you have received to date and other medical conditions. Carry this card with your passport while traveling—should you encounter a medical emergency, this may prove invaluable.
**Student Health Services (SHS)**
Prior to your departure, the CIE will host health meetings corresponding with the region of the world to which you will be travelling. These health meetings are presented in conjunction with Student Health Services (SHS) on-campus. Health consultations and some immunizations are available on an individual basis by scheduling with SHS.

**General Medical Concerns**
It is a excellent idea to have a routine physical exam or check-up prior to your departure. Additionally, it is suggested that you schedule routine visits to your eye doctor, dentist and any other specialist(s). We recommend that you bring the telephone and fax numbers for all doctors’ offices that you may visit. In case of any medical emergency, you will be able to obtain your medical records quickly without any unnecessary hassles.

Students with severe asthma, epilepsy, heart conditions, allergies to antibiotics, and other medical conditions should consider purchasing a Medic-Alert tag to wear. These tags are internationally recognized and will alert medical personnel to your condition. For more information, visit Medic Alert’s website [www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org).

Meet with Student Health Services regarding your travel plans and country of destination.

Bring legible copies of any medical prescriptions you are taking. You may also want to have your doctor prescribe substitute or alternate drug(s) in case your exact prescription is not available overseas. You are advised to take with you the medications you will need for the duration of your program abroad. Carry a copy of the prescription and/or a physician’s statement that you may need to present when you enter the host country to document your need to import medication. All medications and medical supplies should be carried in their original labeled containers to facilitate admission and inspection at foreign ports of entry. Be aware that some drugs may be considered illegal therefore first check with the consulate.

U.S. prescriptions may not be valid overseas, even with the actual bottle of medication. It is a good idea to carry with you a small card detailing your medical history and prior immunizations. Keep this with your passport while traveling—it may prove useful should you encounter a medical emergency.
Students with Disabilities
Students with concerns about disability should access Mobility International at http://www.miusa.org or via e-mail at miusa@igc.apc.org. They can provide current information regarding facilities and access conditions abroad.

AIDS/HIV/STDs
Just as you do at home, you need accurate information on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and safe sex practices. Some countries require HIV screening prior to visa issuance or admission. If testing is required, you may want to secure test results in the U.S. to avoid the possibility of testing with reused needles common in some parts of the world. In some countries, blood transfusions are not always screened for HIV or hepatitis; transfusions in developing countries should be refused except in life-threatening situations. Ask your program director to help identify possible sources of safe and pre-screened blood in case of an emergency. These may include embassies, private hospitals and U.S. military bases. For pre-departure information on AIDS and HIV, see the CDC National HIV/AIDS website http://www.cdc.gov/hiv.

General Ailments
Most general ailments you may encounter while abroad can be assessed and provided for at local pharmacies. It’s always a good idea to bring with you certain over-the-counter medications, though. You never know when you’ll need the Tylenol, Pepto Bismal, or cortisone cream!

Sexual Assault/Harassment
Just as countries have different laws and customs regarding alcohol and drug use, cultural norms may dictate that actions and/or dress may be interpreted differently. It is important to be aware of these cultural differences. Regardless of these norms, you are encouraged to reach out to the College of Charleston and report any concerns.

In the case of sexual assault and/or harassment, find a safe place and assess how you would like to proceed. You may wish to seek medical attention, contact the local authorities, or seek counsel from someone you trust. The College of Charleston and the Center for International Education take reports of sexual assault and discrimination very seriously and are available to provide guidance and assistance.
Financial Information

Money
If you can, bring a small amount of LOCAL CURRENCY for the country in which you will be arriving. This will help when you arrive in the country to cover expenses such as phone calls, bus or train rides, taxis, or meals. However, most airports have ATMs or an exchange kiosk so you will have the opportunity to obtain local currency upon your arrival.

Before you leave, be sure to find out how to get money wired or transferred to you should the need arise. You don’t want to waste any time if an emergency situation arises while abroad. Know that bank drafts and wire transfers take time to clear—they can also be very expensive, depending on service fees. American checks take several days to clear in a foreign bank.

ATM CARDS are the easiest and least costly means of getting money. The exchange rates are usually good and fees minimal. Deposits made in the U.S. can be quickly accessed by an ATM. While you should have some other means of obtaining money, ATM access is often a good option. Some banks are being proactive in preventing fraudulent charges on accounts. Before leaving, notify your bank that you will be staying in a particular country for a specified amount of time. This will help prevent your bank from canceling your card.

CREDIT CARDS are widely accepted, with Visa and MasterCard being the most common cards. Check with each company before your departure to see what services are offered. Credit cards may earn a better exchange rate than cash or traveler’s checks. Notify the credit card company that you will be overseas. This will help prevent your credit card company from canceling your card as some credit card companies are being proactive in preventing fraudulent charges on accounts.

FOREIGN BANKS usually offer the best exchange rates on cash and traveler’s checks. Do note that it is common for many banks and other exchange bureaus to charge a service fee for exchanging money. In some cases, this may be a percentage fee, while in others, a flat fee will be charged. Ask before you exchange your money to see how much the transaction will cost. Bring your passport with you to the bank, since many transactions cannot be completed without it. Using you International Student Identity Card (ISIC) at certain locations around the
world may allow you to exchange money without being charged a commission or 
fee. Also, if your current bank is part of an international network of foreign banks 
such as Bank of America and the Global ATM Alliance, this may provide certain 
benefits such as fee waiver on ATM withdrawals.

Finally, the most important thing to do with financial concerns is to make a list of 
credit cards or bankcards you will be taking with you overseas. Write down the 
card number, the name as it appears on the card and the contact numbers should 
the card become lost or stolen. Remember that toll-free “800 Numbers” do NOT 
work from overseas, so be sure to get an actual long distance phone number to 
call (collect) should a problem arise. Make several copies of this list; leave copies 
with your parents or friends and bring your own set and store them in different 
and secure locations.

**Packing Tips**

- **Bring as little as possible!** Do not bring more that you can carry by 
yourself at one time. You may want to lay out everything you think you 
will need, and then force yourself to take only half. Remember, you will 
be shopping in your host country or at least bringing home some 
souvenirs. Leave room for them! Check with the airline to see what their 
weight and size limits are for each piece of luggage as they frequently 
change.

- When packing, take some things that you will not mind leaving behind if 
necessary. For instance, if you bring a towel, bring one that you could 
leave behind therefore making more room for your return home.

- Consider packing toiletries as these can be more expensive in some 
countries and they may not have your preferred brand. Then you will have 
extra space for when you return home.

- Bring a backpack. This can come in very handy for school and for 
weekend traveling. You may also buy a large backpack for longer trips. 
Backpacks are a great piece of traveling equipment because your hands 
remain free. A good combination of luggage is to have a suitcase on 
wheels, a large backpack and a carry-on. With this combination you will 
be able to transport your entire luggage yourself.

- Be sure to bring clothing appropriate to the places you will be visiting.
Read about the places that you intend to visit, as there might be restrictions on the type of clothing that you are allowed to wear. Keep in mind the season of when you are arriving.

- Take two or three pairs of shoes!! Choose pairs that are comfortable and go with all of your clothing. Shoes take up a lot of room in your luggage and make it very heavy. Remember less is better!
- Be sure to pack copies of your passport in each piece of luggage.
- Your luggage should be sturdy and durable, but not flashy. You do not want to draw attention to yourself while traveling.

**WHILE YOU ARE ABROAD**

**Safety and Security**

**Basic Tips for Safety and Security**

- Never carry large amounts of cash.
- Register with Safe Traveler’s Enrollment Program via the Department of State website: https://step.state.gov/step/
- Make a list of credit and debit cards and their emergency numbers—keep separate from you wallet.
- Make a copy of your airline ticket and passport—keep them separate.
- Don’t attract attention to yourself by wearing provocative clothing or behaving boisterously.
- Avoid large crowds, especially protests and demonstrations, as they have the potential to become volatile.
- Know the local traffic laws. In some countries, such as the UK, they drive on the left side of the road. This is critical to remember when crossing the street. Be aware that pedestrians may not have the right of way in your host country.
- When out at night, make sure you are with friends.
- Only use official, marked taxis.
- When traveling, provide your program director and/or host family with your itinerary and lodging information. Then they know how to contact you in an emergency situation.
- Understand that as a foreigner you are more vulnerable than the local residents to petty theft. Be especially careful when consuming alcohol. Be
aware that in some countries the alcohol content is higher than in the U.S.

- Acceptable behavior for females in foreign countries varies, so it is important to learn the norms of your host country. Female students may attract unwanted attention by wearing skimpy clothing or through what might be perceived as flirtatious behavior.
- STDs are a worldwide health problem. Use the same precautions overseas as you would at home. Be aware that the quality of some contraceptives in some countries is unreliable.

**Orientation**

It is important that you attend your program's and/or host university's orientation session(s). This will help you make the most of your time abroad. You should take this opportunity to get acquainted with your program director and resident staff. They will be able to provide you with assistance will may need while abroad and with information particular to your program.

**Register with the U.S. Embassy**

In the event that a national emergency does arise, the U.S. Embassy will be able to contact you. Registering is also a good idea in the event that your passport becomes lost or stolen—the Embassy will have a record of it on file. You can contact the U.S. Department of State at 1 (202) 647-5226 to find out the location of the U.S. Embassy closest to your foreign university.

**Familiarize Yourself with the Environment**

Once you arrive, take some time to learn about your surroundings. Learn your address and phone numbers, and emergency numbers; be able to locate the nearest bus/train stop(s), and learn the routes and fares, etc. If you are studying in a non-English speaking country and are not taking a language course, learn some key words and phrases to help you navigate your host city. Also, locate the nearest grocery store, post office, currency exchange, newsstand, hospital/doctor, and pharmacy. More importantly, you should learn your way around your university and be able to find your classes before the first day of school! Become familiar with the local currency and always remember to count your change. Foreigners can be taken advantage of easily if they don't know how the money units are arranged. Always remember that you are subject to the local laws of the host country, no matter what citizenship you may hold.

**Contacts Abroad**

If your family or friends have any contacts overseas, it is always a good idea to bring their names and numbers with you. Local contacts can provide you with
information or suggestions, and help you in an emergency situation.

**Living Abroad**

If you are able, it is a good idea to arrive a few days before classes start, so you will have some time to adjust and learn your way around. You will be able to overcome the effects of jetlag within about two days, which will make adjustment to your new home easier.

Your living accommodations may be more modest than what you are used to here in the United States. Be prepared for less heat and less hot water, fewer electrical conveniences, and smaller bedrooms. Toiletries and other items you may use on a daily basis may not be available or could be more expensive. Keep this in mind when packing.

If you plan to take electrical appliances such as a razor or hairdryer, you may wish to consider purchasing an inexpensive model upon your arrival abroad. The standard for electricity in the United States is 110 volts/60 cycles; in most European countries it is 220 volts/50 cycles. Purchase a good converter in the United States, otherwise you run the risk of ruining your appliance and perhaps starting an electrical fire.

**Culture Shock**

*Survival Kit for Overseas Living* by L. Robert Kohls provides very useful information on Culture Shock. Culture, as defined by Kohls, is “an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society. It refers to the total way of life of particular groups of people”. Culture contains, but is not limited to, manners, customs, beliefs, laws, arts, values, and morals. Sometimes Americans have a difficult time understanding that what is important in our culture may not be important in other cultures and vice versa.

Kohl suggests looking at ourselves from a “cross-cultural perspective”. Try and view yourself through the eyes of someone in a different culture and this can give you a different and new view of yourself. Remember that there are positive and negative aspects of every culture.

There are a few things that can make your adjustment easier once you are in your new culture. It is best to begin in the area in which you live and get comfortable with it. You can then begin to venture into the surrounding neighborhoods and learn local restaurants, transportation and government offices. It is also very important to know street signs, the monetary system, and
landmarks. In addition to knowing your surroundings, it is extremely helpful to talk to people and accept the locals’ help. Do not be afraid to ask questions! Always keep an open mind when getting to know your host country.

Everyone that lives abroad has some experience, some greater than others, in culture shock. Kohls states that culture shock “comes from the experience of encountering ways of doing, organizing, perceiving, or valuing things which are different from yours and which threatens your basic, unconscious belief that your encultured customs, assumptions, values and behaviors are right”. There is believed to be four stages of culture shock: initial euphoria, irritability and hostility, gradual adjustment and adaptation/biculturalism. Do not panic because you will reach the stage of adaptation.

Culture Shock!: A Survival Guide to Etiquette and Customs is another helpful resource that has a book for each country and can be purchased online. These books provide more detailed information than a travel guide book would have as they are geared towards living in a country, versus traveling.

**Communication**

**Communication from Abroad**

For calling back to the US, it is easiest to buy prepaid phone cards in your host country. Don’t forget about time differences! You don’t want to be calling home to ask for money when it’s 3:30 a.m. on the East Coast.

Depending on where you are studying abroad, you will have several options for communicating with family and friends back home. Skype and e-mail are the most common methods.

- **Phone Calls:** One of the best ways to call from landline to landline is to purchase a prepaid phone card once you arrive in your host country.
- **Voice Over IP (VoIP):** Services such as Skype, Google Chat, and iChat allow the user to conduct voice and video chat from computer to computer over the internet for free. Skype has the additional capability of calling landlines for an additional fee. Please see the respective service providers for more information.
- **E-mail:** Most cities have “Cyber Cafes.” Be sure to show your student
I.D. card as discounts are often granted for students.

- **Standard Mail**, in some cases, can take up to several months for a letter to reach its destination. Be sure to remember that *airmail* and *surface mail* are two completely different things and cost different rates. Airmail is significantly faster, but more expensive. Write “air mail” or “surface mail” on your envelopes in the language of your host country—you must have “air mail” written otherwise your letter will arrive via surface (slower) mail. Also, know the custom laws on what items can be shipped out as this can delay a package.

**Communication from Home**

Make sure your friends and family know how to contact you and are aware of the time changes involved. To make calls from the United States to an overseas location:

- **Dial 011 [Country Code] [City Code] [Local Number]**

If the City Code begins with a Zero (0), eliminate the zero when dialing from the U.S. A list of telephone country codes can generally be found in the first few pages of most telephone books.

**Homestays**

If you will be living with a host family, keep in mind that arrangements can vary greatly from home to home. Understand very clearly what is expected of you and what guidelines you should follow. A homestay can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a study abroad experience where you can gain unique insight into the ways of another culture. Bring photos to show your host family what your family in the United States is like!

You should always ask what is included in your homestay so there are no surprises upon arrival. Is laundry included...? Are meals included...and if so, how many per day/week...? What if you skip meals...?

Some Dos and Don’ts of Homestays

- If you follow strict religious observances, have special health needs or allergies, require a special diet or a non-smoking host, notify your program sponsor well in advance of your departure. Often your homestay experience will depend as much on your cooperation, good will and courtesy, as it does on the family's.
- Bring a small, inexpensive gift and pictures of your family and friends. It’s the thought that counts, not the price tag.
• Offer to help with household tasks, although your help may be declined.
• Be sure to keep your room neat and tidy.
• Don’t always assume that you can have overnight visitors—be sure to ask before extending an invitation. And check to make sure your family will permit guests of the opposite sex.
• If you smoke, check to see what the family rules are concerning smoking in the house.
• Talk to your family about entry/exit habits—that is, is it okay to come home at 2:00 a.m.? Do they have a spare key for you? Should you leave the door unlocked?
• Always be sure to notify your family if you are going to deviate from set plans. Even though they are not your natural parents, they may feel responsible for you if you do not come home when expected. It’s always best to call and check in to let them know what is going on.
• Ask permission to use the telephone and pay for calls made. Don’t be surprised if calling is limited.
• Do not raid the refrigerator without permission.
• Do not use an excessive amount of hot water and/or electricity. Don’t leave lights on when you’re not in the room. If you can control the temperature in your room, check with your host family to see what is acceptable and what isn’t. Heat/air-conditioning may be very expensive.
• Watch your spending habits. If you are spending an excessive amount of money on shopping or other purchases, your family may feel uncomfortable, especially if their standard of living is lower than yours.
• If your family has a washing machine, ask for help the first few times you use it. Even though symbols may look like they do at home, the machine may still operate differently and you could end up having to mop a flooded floor! It is common in many places to have only a washing machine and no dryer.
• No matter where you are staying, make sure to have the name and phone number of the person or group picking you up from the airport when you arrive, if this is applicable.
• Periodic gifts to your host are suggested, to show your appreciation.

Responsibility as an Ambassador Abroad
Student Code of Conduct
Students studying abroad during their time as a College of Charleston student are held accountable to the Student Code of Conduct as set forth by Student Affairs.
During your time abroad, you are acting as an ambassador of the College as well as the United States. Any violation of the Code of Conduct abroad may result in disciplinary sanctions during your program and/or upon your return to the College. For more information, please review the student handbook on the Student Affairs website:


**Alcohol and Drugs**
Countries have different laws and customs regarding alcohol and drug use. It is your responsibility to be aware of these differences and to act accordingly. All students are expected to abide by the College of Charleston Student Code of Conduct and host university/provider policies regarding the use of alcohol and drugs. Failure to comply could result in disciplinary sanction or legal action during your program and/or your return to the College. Be informed about smart travel by reviewing the State Department’s tips on drinking and drugs: https://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en/smart-travel/drinking-and-drugs.html.

**General Information**

**Travel Issues/General Considerations**

- Reconfirm all airline reservations at least 72 hours before departure. When calling the airline(s), don’t forget to request a special meal if you are a vegetarian, eat Kosher, or have other dietary concerns.

- Do you have connecting flights? If so, be sure you allow yourself plenty of time to make your connection. Some airports such as JFK Airport in New York are enormous. A few hours between flights is recommended—check with your airline or travel agent for advice. Also note that some cities have multiple airports—Paris has two airports: Charles DeGaulle and Orly; the New York area has three: JFK, LaGuardia and Newark; London has two main airports: Gatwick and Heathrow; Tokyo has two airports that are more than an hour apart. Be sure you know from which one(s) your flights arrive and depart. Connecting between airports is a hassle you will want to avoid.

- Jet lag is something students will encounter during the first few days of their arrival overseas. Feelings of fatigue, disorientation, depression and/or homesickness are symptoms of jet lag and are completely normal. It will take several days before jet lag is overcome and adjustment to the new surroundings and time zone is achieved. Try to relax and take it easy during the first few days in order to alleviate any jet lag symptoms. Avoid alcohol, get plenty of exercise and drink plenty of water to ease the effects of jet lag.
lag.

**Emergencies Abroad**

Should you encounter an emergency abroad, be aware that there are several resources to assist you. The American Citizens Service (ACS) is an agency within each U.S. Embassy that serves to help Americans abroad in the following situations:

- **Passport replacements:** you can have your passport replaced usually within 24 hours, even faster if you can produce a photocopy of your original passport along with extra passport photos. Always be sure to have photocopies of the first two pages of your passport and visa page with you and leave copies at home that can be faxed to you in an emergency.

- **Financial assistance:** ACS can help transfer funds abroad in the event of an emergency.

- **Medical assistance:** ACS can provide information on local doctors, dentists, mental health specialists, hospitals and clinics.

- **Serious illness/injury:** ACS can inform your family if you are seriously injured or ill; they may also assist in arranging your return (at your expense) to the United States.

- **Disaster/evacuation:** ACS can provide a wide array of services in the event of a natural disaster or civil unrest, including help with evacuation.

- **Arrest:** Contact the ACS immediately if you are arrested overseas. They CANNOT have you released but can provide a list of local lawyers to contact. A consular official will also visit you in jail and inform you about the laws and contact your family.

For more information, contact the U.S. Department of State at (202) 647-5225 or visit their website at [http://travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov). In an emergency situation after hours, call (202) 647-4000 and ask for the Duty Officer.

**Communal vs. Personal Emergencies**

Communal emergencies are those that affect others as well as yourself. These may present themselves in the form of a natural disaster, terrorist attack, or civil unrest. You should prepare yourself for these situations by:

- Knowing your program’s/host university’s emergency procedures. Pay attention during orientation and carefully review all materials provided. Keep your program’s/host university’s emergency contact information in a safe place and with you at all times.

- Carry your health insurance card and the company’s contact information with you at all times.
• In the event of a communal emergency, contact your parents first and as soon as it is safe to do so. Then contact the program staff and/or the Center for International Education. Follow any instructions provided by program staff and contact the US embassy for assistance, if necessary.

• Should a scenario arise in which you are instructed to Shelter in Place, please follow the CDC guidelines: http://emergency.cdc.gov/preparedness/shelter/index.asp.

**Staying Healthy**
While traveling abroad, it is important to keep in mind that the water supply in certain countries may not always be safe for drinking. Check to see if it is recommended that you drink bottled water during your travels. Also, it should be noted that foods such as salads, fruits and vegetables should be avoided in locations where consumption of tap water is not advisable. These foods are generally washed before being served and this can cause discomfort or illness. Refer to the Centers for Disease Control website for more information: http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/page/food-water-safety.

It is recommended to carry a small medical kit with you while traveling. A simple kit should include: Band-Aids, pain relievers, sunscreen, sunburn ointment, skin moisturizer, insect repellant, anti-bacterial ointment, water purification tablets, anti-diarrhea and upset stomach remedies.
No matter what you choose to bring with you, be sure to check all expiration dates on pharmaceutical and medical products!

**Spending Money**
Keep all bills and receipts from transactions conducted abroad. This will help you should you have any problems with faulty merchandise or medical bills to be reimbursed by insurance companies.

AVOID EXCHANGING MONEY ON THE “BLACK MARKET”! In almost all countries, exchanging money with an unauthorized source is ILLEGAL and DANGEROUS. You should only exchange your money in banks and other established offices.

**Legal Matters**
While you are abroad, you are subject to the laws of your host country. Should you require legal assistance while overseas, contact your program director and a U.S.
consular official immediately. Consular officials cannot serve as attorneys or give legal advice, but they can provide lists of local attorneys and help you find legal representation. Also, Consular officials CANNOT get you out of jail. However, if you are arrested, ask permission to notify a consular official—it is your right. American consular officials will visit you, advise you of your rights under local laws and will contact your family and friends if you wish. They can assist you with any money transfers that may be necessary. Keep in mind that the laws concerning drunk driving, the possession and/or selling of illegal drugs in most foreign countries are MORE SEVERE than they are in the United States. Even if you are not using drugs, you may find yourself “guilty by association” if you are at a party where drugs are present. If that situation arises, you should leave immediately.

**Traveling While Abroad**

While abroad, you will spend a good deal of time traveling. Since everyone has different goals for their journeys, we would like to raise your awareness on several general issues.

Through STEP, you will receive emails with important information related to the country you are living in or traveling to. This will help you make safe plans in case you need to avoid certain areas. For example, if there are anticipated political demonstrations.

Normal common sense should prevail when traveling abroad, just as it would at home. Be especially cautious in situations where you are more likely to be victimized such as in crowded subways, buses, train stations, elevators, market places, and festivals.

In addition, keep track of the news to be aware of any potential problems in areas where you may be traveling. Keep your money and tickets in a money belt. It is not a good idea to carry a purse or handbag with valuables because this is too convenient for snatch-and-run type thievery. Leave all expensive items at home.

- When purchasing your transportation, whether it be air, rail or sea, consulting a student travel agency is very helpful. Not only will they be able to locate discounts available exclusively to students, but the staff will often times provide recommendations of places to visit and things to do while traveling. Consult your travel guide for local travel agents. Do check around between agencies as each offers unique discounts that the other may not have.
- Airline tickets offered at student discounts may or may not have
restrictions resulting in severe penalties for itinerary and/or date changes. It is advisable to ask before you purchase your ticket what the conditions are. Is there a fee to change dates? Can you earn frequent flyer points?

- Train reservations are mandatory on some train routes, especially between two major cities during the business week. Check with a local train station to see if a reservation is necessary for the route on which you will be traveling. Reservations often carry a small charge, so be prepared to pay or else take a chance at getting an unreserved seat.

- Daily passes for travel on buses, trams or trains might be cheaper than purchasing individual tickets if you are traveling within a major city for a certain period of time. Some cities offer 24-hour travel passes that make traveling much easier and much cheaper.

- Travel insurance is something students may wish to consider if they are purchasing a travel package or airline ticket that carries strict penalties for cancellation. In the event of illness, a travel insurance policy should cover the cost of replacement or refund, thereby eliminating any penalties imposed by the airline/operator. Ask a travel agent for more information about such policies.

- Dates of travel are always an issue to keep in mind during the planning stages. Many shops are closed on Sundays in Europe; in Israel, shops are closed on Saturday. Every country is different and guidebooks will provide you with hours of banks, shops and museums. It is fairly common for museums to be closed one day a week; refer to travel guidebooks for detailed information.

- Holidays are another logistical factor to consider while planning trips. Many cities shut down completely for holidays, while banks may be the only institution in observance of some holidays. Transportation schedules may be drastically changed to reflect the holiday—you don’t want to be waiting three hours for a train that has been cancelled. Some countries have local holidays, in addition to national holidays. Guidebooks provide information that will help you plan your travels around holidays.

- Festivals and big events are fun to attend while traveling. Despite the festive atmosphere, you must constantly be aware of pickpockets and other petty thievery. Large crowds and gatherings are the perfect settings for pickpockets to ruin the fun of others. Be aware of anything unusual, such as being squirted with ketchup or mustard—a distraction tool used by pickpockets and thieves. Never keep your wallet in your back pocket and avoid using the tourist-style hip bags. In a large crowd, you should know how to shout “Stop Thief” or another phrase to call for help should you become a victim.
• Strikes can also throw an unexpected curve into your plans. Keep abreast of world news while abroad. Should a strike arise, contact your program director for further information or make alternate plans.

• Lodging is very important to plan in advance. You do not want to be walking around a foreign city without a place to stay. The student guidebooks (“Lonely Planet”, “Let’s Go”) and www.hostelworld.com provide lists of budget places to stay. Additionally, tourist offices can provide the same information that is often more current.

• Leave your travel itinerary and contact/lodging information with your program director, host family or friends. This will be invaluable should an emergency situation arise and they need to reach you.

Preparing for Your Return
Several weeks before you return home, you may wish to start preparing for re-entry. Spend time with your friends and enjoy your final weeks/days abroad. Don’t wait until the last morning to take pictures…especially of your neighborhood, your friends, etc… Take pictures throughout your program. Consider submitting some of your images to the CIE study abroad photo contest—cash prizes are awarded. For more information visit http://international.cofc.edu/study-abroad/photo-contest.php.

Aside from preparing yourself mentally, you should also begin to consider re-packing and how you intend to bring all of your belongings that you have accumulated. Excess baggage fees are often very expensive. You will need to check with the airline for extra fees.

Re-entry Procedures
Contact the CIE upon your return to CofC. We’d love to hear about your experience abroad! Please leave your new address and phone number with our office, should the need arise for us to contact you.

The CIE offers two different options for staying involved upon your return. If you are interested in speaking with students seeking to study abroad, consider applying for our Peer Advisor Internship position. Your input and experiences can help the CIE staff in assisting prospective students. By working in the office, you
can help other students in their decision-making process. It always helps students to speak to someone who has just returned from the same country or program in which they are interested. If you would like to become a peer advisor, please visit http://international.cofc.edu/study-abroad/peer-advisors.php.

Alternatively, if you really enjoyed meeting students from all over the world, we would love to have you join us as a Cougar Ambassador (CA). Our CAs work one-on-one with our incoming international students to help them adjust to life in Charleston. For more information, please visit http://international.cofc.edu/volunteer-opportunities/cougar-ambassadors.php.

**U.S. Customs and Immigration**

Upon your arrival in the United States, you will exit your plane and proceed to Immigration. Here they will stamp your passport and welcome you back home. Next you will enter the arrival hall and claim your checked luggage. From here, you will proceed to the Customs Inspector who will either a) send you on your way, or b) ask you to open your bags. They have the legal right to search your possessions and to open your bags for inspection. Additionally, you should know that most, if not all, U.S. airports have drug and agriculture sniffing dogs, trained to spot drugs and food items being brought into the country. If you are asked to open your bags, be polite and cooperate with the search.

The U.S. Customs Service has a website where you can find information regarding Customs regulations: http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/.

**Suggestions for Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock**

- Don’t be surprised that many of your friends and family may not understand what you have experienced, and may not demonstrate the level of interest in your semester or year abroad that you had expected.
- Use diplomacy in raving about your host country.
- Avoid criticizing the United States and always comparing it to your host country.
- Don’t impose your cultural changes on others.
- Seek out your good friends and share both the joy and readjustment problems.
- Listen to those who have remained at home; they will also have stories to tell.
- Consider the techniques you used in adjusting to your host country and use those same strategies.
• When asked stereotypical questions, respond with your observations and experience of reality.
• Always rely on a sense of humor!
• Stay physically healthy since stress may cause you to be unduly tired, easily depressed or subject to minor illnesses.
• Spend time alone to sort out your feelings, to set new goals and priorities, to put things into perspective and to separate the lasting benefits from the casual impressions.
• Meet with other returning students to share experiences and advice on re-adjustment issues.
• Extend hospitality to foreign students, faculty and visitors on campus.
• Keep up with developments in the host country. One of the best parts of an overseas experience are the friends made. Make every effort to keep the friendships as strong as they were when abroad.
A-Z Packing Checklist

☐ Anti-biotic ointments
☐ Alarm Clock (battery operated with an alarm)
☐ Adapters/Converter (if necessary)

☐ Backpack
☐ Band-Aids
☐ Bathing Suit
☐ Batteries (don't forget camera batteries)
☐ Beach towel

☐ Camera (and any cords needed to transfer pictures, extra memory cards)
☐ Chapstik (or any other lip balm)
☐ Chargers (for non-battery electronics)
☐ Comb/Hairbrush
☐ Contact Lenses and your prescription—also contact lens solutions/cleaners
☐ Contraceptives/condoms

☐ Decongestant products (for colds/flu)
☐ Deodorant

☐ Feminine hygiene products
☐ Flashlight (you’ll use it more than you think)
☐ Flashdrive (to store photos)
☐ Flip-Flops/Sandals (for hostel showers)

☐ Gifts (for your host family or for friends you make overseas)
☐ Glasses and your prescription

☐ ISIC Card
☐ Itinerary

☐ Journal

☐ Kleenex
☐ Knife (small Swiss Army style...only in checked luggage)

☐ Laptop Computer
☐ Laundry soap (e.g. packets of Tide) and a portable clothes line
- Linens (does your program provide sheets and bedding?)
- Locks for your suitcase and backpack (combination locks are better)
- MP3 player/iPod with headphones
- Maps
- Medical kit with pain relievers you use (cold/cough meds, meds for upset stomach and diarrhea)
- Money Belt and/or Neck Pouch
- Nail Clippers (for check-in luggage)
- Nice Clothes for special occasions
- Passport and Visa (if necessary)
- Passport photos (they will speed up replacement of your passport should that become necessary / for transportation passes if needed)
- Photocopies of your passport and visas
- Postcards (of your hometown—great to give to kids or show where you are from)
- Prescription medications and copy of prescription
- Rail Passes (you can’t buy them overseas)
- Raincoat
- Razor and blades (if it’s an electric one, don’t forget a converter)
- Resume (you never know whom you’ll meet while traveling!)
- SENSE OF ADVENTURE!
- Sewing kit (a small one will be fine)
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Tissues
- Toiletries
- Towels and washcloths (does your program provide towels?)
- Travel Guide(s)
- Umbrella (the smaller the better)
- Wet-naps or handy wipes; hand sanitizer
- Ziploc-type plastic bags (they are a lifesaver, especially when packing or on daytrips)
Helpful Websites

Abroad Office
http://cofc.abroadoffice.net/index.html

CofC Study Abroad Homepage
http://International.cofc.edu
Has great links to many other travel resources.

U. S. State Department
www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/
Background notes on countries.

U.S. State Department Information for Student Travelers
www.studentsabroad.state.gov

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)
http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/step.html
Sign up for STEP to receive the latest travel updates and information!

Center for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov
Information on health and immunizations.

World Health Organization
www.who.org

Lonely Planet Travelers Health Website
www.lonelyplanet.com/health

Study Abroad.com
www.studyabroad.com
A wealth of study abroad information, including their own handbook.

Geopedia
www.geopedia.com
Has country information sheets for every country.

Exchange Rates
www.xe.net/currency
Current listing of exchange rates; can also convert between two foreign currencies.

Time Zones
www.timeanddate.com/worldclock

New York Times
www.nytimes.com
You can keep up to date on U. S. news while abroad by visiting this site.

Hostel World—www.hostelworld.com

Air BnB—www.airbnb.com

Nation Master—http://www.nationmaster.com/
Helpful Travel Websites & Apps

Skyscanner  
www.skyscanner.net

Kayak  
www.kayak.com

Student Universe  
www.studentuniverse.com
Has great student airfare

STA Travel  
www.statravel.com

EasyJet  
www.easyjet.com
Low cost airline for travel within Europe

Ryanair  
www.ryanair.com
Low cost airline for travel within Europe

Vueling  
www.vueling.com
Low cost airline for travel within Europe

TACA Air  
www.taca.com
Airfare around Latin America and the Caribbean

European Railways  
www.raileurope.com
The North American website of the European Railways, complete with rail timetables

Duolingo

Google Flights

Spending Tracker

Tipulator

Urban Spoon

Viber

Wi-fi Finder

WhatsApp
It’s your world, discover it!

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