STUDENT GUIDE TO STUDY ABROAD FOR AFFILIATE AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMS
The Center for International Education Staff

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All photos in this handbook were taken by CofC students & submitted to our photo contest. Please be sure to submit your photos upon your return!
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BEFORE YOU GO

Pre-Departure Checklist
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, modes of transportation, emergency numbers, etc.
- Apply for a passport and visa, if necessary
- Coordinate arrival logistics
- Notify your bank and credit card companies about your overseas travel
- Check with your bank and credit card companies about international transaction fees
- Bring some local currency with you if possible (check with local bank)
- Create a budget for you term abroad
- Schedule medical and dental check-ups
- Obtain necessary vaccinations and prescriptions
- Make a packing list

At College of Charleston
- Complete all application and post-acceptance forms on ViaTRM
- Contact CIE about any changes related to your program
- Discuss applying for additional financial aid with the Office of Financial Assistance and Veteran Affairs (if applicable)
- Clear debts at the Treasurer’s Office
- Clear holds on student account
- Notify Housing that you will be abroad (if applicable)

Health, Safety, and Documents
- Make/scan copies of passport; leave one with family, take at least two with you, and save a copy electronically
- Read health, safety, and travel recommendations for your host country
- Purchase a money belt, neck pouch, or purse with a cross-body strap
- Provide family/friend with copies of your itinerary and contact information
- Register your travels with the U.S. Department of State’s STEP program: https://step.state.gov/
GOAL SETTING

Whether you are spending a week, a month, a semester or a full year abroad, it is important to set goals so you can have the most fulfilling study abroad experience possible. Ask yourself:

- Why do I want to study abroad?
- What do I hope to accomplish while abroad?
- What are a few things I definitely want to see/ experience while abroad?

**Academic Goals**

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**Personal Goals**

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**Professional Goals**

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**Bucket List of Sites / Experiences in Host Country/ Region**

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Remember “study abroad” is first and foremost an educational experience.

**Transfer Credit**
A copy of your course approval form is available under the “Forms” section of your Via TRM account (cofc.via-trm.com). 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 CIE advisor and the appropriate departmental contact with your new course selection(s). The course approval directory can be found at:  
http://international.cofc.edu/study-abroad/resources/index.php. 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 grade equivalent of a U.S. "C" or better to receive transfer credits as awarded by the host institution. The grades do not affect your CofC GPA.

**NOTE** for students with Life Scholarships: Grades earned through U.S. institutions (ex: Butler, Arcadia, University of South Florida, etc.) will be factored in to student’s Life 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 eligible transfer credit is posted by the Transfer Resource Center.

**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. It is important to meet with your major advisor or Academic Advising to determine the courses you need to take. Registration entry dates can be found at http://registrar.cofc.edu. Check for your entry date based on your earned hours. 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://catalog.cofc.edu as well as general graduation requirements through Degree Works.

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

**Universities Abroad**
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.

**Official 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 official transcript and all course approvals are documented on your Course Approval Form (Green Sheet). Please note that transcripts can take up to 90 days to be received from your host university/program.*
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 at time of application. You can apply for a passport in person at CofC Mail Services located on St. Phillip Street. Should you need expedited service, additional charges will apply. Visit the U. S. Department of State website for more passport information and to download a passport application http://travel.state.gov.

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. You should also save a copy on your phone or electronically on Google Drive.

In 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.

Some countries require non-citizens to carry their passport or other documents on them at all times. You may even need your passport on hand to check into hostels or hotels. 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
View the Helpful Websites at the end of this guide for travel recommendations. Be sure you are scheduled to arrive in time for orientation at your host program/ university.

Visas
A visa is an immigration document that is official permission to enter a country legally for a certain period of time; visa requirements vary per country. If you will need a visa, you will receive information about how to apply from your study abroad provider/host university. This is a crucial aspect of the study abroad experience, so you need to be diligent in your application process. Visas may not be required for shorter programs, but 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. Visa processing can take up to several months and each country requires specific documents. You need a valid passport to apply for a visa and some student visas carry certain restrictions (e.g. no employment).

**Residence Permit**
Some countries may require registering with local police or equivalent authority in lieu of obtaining a visa.

**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, if you are an F-1 student, 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

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**IMPORTANT PREPARATIONS**

**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 (Sweet Grass Rose)

**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.
Access to Bills
Several weeks before going abroad, you will want to make sure you can continue receiving the following, either electronically or by providing a change of address if necessary. Electronic access is preferred to minimize delays.

- 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 Research
It is your responsibility to learn as much as you can about your host country before your arrival. Try making a playlist or cooking a recipe from that country.

There are many aspects of a culture that you should learn about, such as:

- 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
- Dating customs
- Drinking age

Become familiar with the current events and history for your host country and the U.S. before you go. People may want to speak with you about current topics/ issues in the United States so be prepared!

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 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 in the host country. It can be dangerous to violate these social norms. Therefore, for your own protection and comfort, we recommend that you are aware of local customs and be sensitive to them.

• Learn about the types of dress that are worn in the host countries culture and their ideas of what is appropriate attire. 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 situations and locations, such as religious sites, you may be barred entry from some places if your dress is considered inappropriate or violates local norms.

• Understand the types of compliments that may be given in the host culture. In some countries whistles and other forms of expression may be used by used by the host culture as compliments and not be perceived as harassment. However, if you feel uncomfortable, walk away and notify your study abroad program/ host university.

**Relationships**

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 expressions of friendship and love that you may experience while studying abroad.

**Diversity**

Diversity appreciation and acceptance (cultural, racial, religious, sexual orientation, etc.) varies among cultures. 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 similar manner in another country. The issues of stereotyping and prejudice may exist in host cultures in ways that are radically different from the U.S. Some suggestions for preparing for unexpected prejudice or racial/ethnic conflict include:

• 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.

• 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 host coordinator or
fellow participants about your feelings.

- In some cases you may find yourself in a situation where locals of your host country may be meeting someone with your skin tone or culture for the first time. This can lead to stereotypical judgments and unfair assumptions. People may be more curious about you and your background; however, that curiosity may lead to a lot of directed questions which under our cultural norms may be felt as invasive or in bad taste. Additionally, you will be traveling with other Americans and international students, so there is a chance for discriminatory attitudes and ignorance to stem from within the group as well.

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, familiarize yourself with the coverage provided by the host 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 abroad, enroll in international insurance through CIE. 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?

**Immunizations**

Some countries require proof of immunization for 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. 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 add you to a classroom on OAKS with important health information and resources. Review the information corresponding with the region of the world to which you will be travelling. These resources were compiled in conjunction with Student Health Services (SHS). Health consultations and some immunizations are available on an individual basis by scheduling with SHS. You can contact SHS at travelmedicine@cofc.edu.

**General Medical Concerns**

It is an 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.

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 medication needs. All medications and medical supplies should be carried in their original labeled containers to facilitate admission and inspection at foreign ports of entry. Some drugs may be considered illegal therefore first check with the consulate. 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.

U.S. prescriptions may not be valid overseas, even with the actual bottle of medication. Carry with you a small card detailing your medical history and prior immunizations, as well as, a copy of your prescription and a list of ingredients specific to your prescriptions. Keep this with your passport while traveling—it may prove useful should you encounter a medical emergency or if your prescription medication is lost.

**Students with Disabilities**
Students seeking accommodations abroad are strongly encouraged to speak with CofC’s Center for Disability Services prior to their departure and find helpful information at Mobility International – www.misua.org. MI providers 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 Bismol, Benedryl 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.

Members of the College of Charleston such as students, faculty, and staff are bound by College policy, including the Student Sexual Misconduct Policy and the Prohibition on Discrimination including Sexual Harassment and Abuse policies, during Study Abroad programs. If you would like to report a potential violation of either of these policies please contact the Center for International Education or the Office of Victim Services.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Money
If you can, bring a small amount of local currency for the country in which you will be arriving. You may be able to order foreign currency from your bank in order to avoid paying high fees at the airport or conversion centers. 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, learn how to wire or transfer money 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 more favorable and fees may be less compared to other currency exchange services. 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 and ask if they have partnerships with any banks in your host country.** You should also notify your bank of any personal travel to other countries. This will help prevent your bank from canceling your card.

**Foreign banks** usually offer the best exchange rates on cash. 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 an 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 than you can carry by yourself at one time. 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 airlines 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 or old pair of jeans, bring ones that you could leave behind therefore making more room for your 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 all of your 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 or contact 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.

**What to Leave at Home**

- Valuables
- Irreplaceable family objects/heirlooms
- All unnecessary credit cards and other items from your wallet
- A copy of the itinerary with family or friends
- Copies of your passport and credit card number
SAFETY AND SECURITY

Basic Tips for Safety and Security

- Never carry large amounts of cash and always keep your wallet in your front pocket or wear a cross body bag/purse.
- 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.
- Only use official, marked taxis.
- 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. Remember this when crossing the street. Also, pedestrians may not have the right of way in your host country.
- When out at night, make sure you are with friends.
- When traveling, provide your program provider, roommates, and 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.

Register with the U.S. Embassy through STEP

Register with Safe Traveler’s Enrollment Program via the Department of State website: https://step.state.gov/step/. 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 visit the U.S. Department of State website
at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) to find out the location of the U.S. Embassy closest to your host program or 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 local 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**

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 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 use electrical appliances such as a razor or hairdryer, you may wish to consider purchasing an inexpensive model upon your arrival abroad or borrow one from a friend who has studied abroad. The standard for electricity in the United States is 110 volts/60 cycles; voltage around the world varies. For a complete list by country, visit [WorldStandards.eu](http://WorldStandards.eu). Purchase a good converter in the United States, otherwise you run the risk of ruining your appliance and perhaps starting an electrical fire.
**CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

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 enculturated 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, you will eventually reach the stage of adaptation.

Culture Shock!: A Survival Guide to Etiquette and Customs is another helpful resource that has 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 from Abroad

There are many options for phone plans abroad. Do your research to determine what will work best for you. It is either easiest to purchase an international phone plan or obtain a SIM card upon arrival. Talk to your phone provider about rates for an international plan and/or confirm that your phone is unlocked. 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 with Wi-fi Calling being the easiest in most countries.

- **Cell Phones**: Are an increasingly common and affordable option. Visit: [http://www.studyabroad.com/pages/sitecontent/parent_guide_cell.aspx](http://www.studyabroad.com/pages/sitecontent/parent_guide_cell.aspx) for more information. Many students also opt to get a local sim card after their arrival on-site.

- **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.

- **Standard Mail**, in some cases, can take up to several months for a letter to reach its destination. Be sure to remember that **air mail** 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.

- Refer to Recommend Apps section in the back of this guide for more information on how to communicate while abroad.

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
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.

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: http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/

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.
**TRAVEL 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. A few hours between flights is recommended. Note: that some cities have multiple airports. Paris has two airports: Charles DeGaulle and Orly; 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. Avoid alcohol and drink plenty of water to ease the effects of jet lag. Try to establish daily routines based on the local time.

**Emergencies Abroad**

Should you encounter an emergency abroad, contact local emergency authorities and notify your host program/university as soon as you are able to safely do so. You should then contact CIE for additional assistance. There are several resources available to assist you such as the American Citizen Services (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, visit the U.S. Department of State’s website at [http://travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov). In an emergency situation after hours, contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

**Communal vs. Personal Emergencies**
Communal emergencies are those that affect others outside of 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 or host university’s emergency procedures. Pay attention during orientation and carefully review all materials provided. Keep your program’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, notify 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. Contact your family as soon as you are able to do so.

• 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](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://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/food-water-safety](http://wwwnc.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.

**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 or host university 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**

- 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.

- 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 the holiday. 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 cultural events are a great way to immerse yourself in the host country. 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 accept a flower or bracelet from a stranger on the street. 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. 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.
Preparation for Your Return

Several weeks before you return home, you should start preparing for re-entry. Spend time with your friends and enjoy your final days in your host city. Take pictures—especially of your neighborhood, your friends, etc. Submit some of your images to the CIE study abroad photo contest—cash prizes are awarded—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!

The CIE offers two different options for staying involved upon your return. If you are interested in assisting students seeking to study abroad, apply for our Peer Advisor Internship position. Your input and experiences help the CIE staff in assisting prospective students. If you would like to become a peer advisor, visit http://international.cofc.edu/study-abroad/peer-advisors.php.

Alternatively, if you really enjoyed meeting students from all over the world, you can 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/co 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 verify your identity with 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.


**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 readjustment issues.
- Extend hospitality to international 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 Suggested 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)
☐ 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
☐ Linens (does your program provide sheets and bedding?)
☐ Locks for your suitcase and backpack (combination locks are better)
☐ Maps (can download from Google Maps & use offline)
☐ Medical kit with pain relievers you use (cold/cough meds, meds for upset stomach and diarrhea)
☐ Money Belt and/or Neck Pouch
☐ Nail Clippers (in checked 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
 Portable Phone Charger
 Postcards (of your hometown–great to give to kids or show where you are from)
 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 (bring a quick dry towel for travel and determine if your program provide stowels)
 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
 CofC Study Abroad Homepage
 http://International.cofc.edu
 Has great links to many other travel resources.

U.S. State Department- Smart Traveler Enrollment Program
 https://step.state.gov/step/
 Register your travel plans to receive information on host countries

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

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

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

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

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

Helpful Travel Websites
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
GoEuro.com
https://www.goeuro.com/
Lists trains, buses, and flights with prices

Helpful Apps
Duolingo
Globe Convert
Google Flights
Google Maps
Go! Currency
Rome to Rio
SpanishDict
Spending Tracker
Tipulator
Urban Spoon
Viber
Wi-Fi Finder
WhatsApp

Notes...