UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD
INTERNATIONAL CENTER

Study Abroad

Health and Safety Checklist
STAYING HEALTHY

- **Assess your health and identify your health needs**: Self-disclosure of existing health issues to your study abroad program or university is vital to a successful study abroad experience. Students (along with their parent/guardian and physician) are responsible for assessing any physical or mental health conditions that may be adversely affected by travel abroad. If physical or mental health conditions require continued therapy, monitoring, or specific support mechanisms while abroad, students must self-disclose the issue(s) to the program organizers well in advance of departure so appropriate accommodations can be arranged.

- **Gather health documentation** such as immunization records, prescriptions, eye glass/contact prescriptions (it is advisable to bring a spare pair). Check to see whether or not immunizations are needed for your host country, or countries in which you plan to travel to. Information on health care and medical facilities in your host country can be found at the Centers for Disease Control.

- **Prescription meds**: Beware of customs limitations and regulations on medicines brought into your host country. Talk to your physician, your study abroad program/university, and the embassy of your host country for more information. Some medications that are routinely prescribed in the U.S. may be much more heavily regulated in other countries. When bringing prescription drugs with you while traveling, bring also a note from your physician describing your condition and the necessity of the medication. Your physician should also include the generic name of the drug as specific brand names available here may not be available elsewhere in the world. Medications should be clearly labeled, include your name, and be in the original container.

- **AIDS and STDs are a problem worldwide**: If you choose to be sexually active while abroad, please do so safely. Please note that latex condoms (the only kind you should be using!) may not always be available where you are traveling so men and women should pack their own supply.

- **Food and Water Born Illness**: Though some stomach problems may be inevitable as you get used to your new environment, avoid food and water born illness by being careful about what you eat and drink (or brush your teeth with!). Many kinds of nasty bugs can be picked up from food and beverages that have been contaminated through improper handling or inadequate purification. Please read carefully the travel advice from the CDC.

SAFETY

- **The International Center will register the group with the local U.S. Embassy**. Registering with the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy will allow them to contact you in case of an emergency.

- **Stay informed** about local events in your host country and around the world. You can do this by reading the country information available on the Department of State travel website, by reading local papers and listening to local radio stations (you can do this via the web before you even leave). You will also receive a lot of useful information in the pre-departure and orientation materials provided by your study abroad program/university.
Make yourself aware of local laws. While living and traveling abroad, you are subject to the laws of your host country.

Be aware of issues (legal, safety and health) around alcohol and drug use. Remember – you are subject to the laws of your host country, and any country to which you travel. The penalties for drug possession and use can be severe, as can be the case with penalties for driving while under the influence (and legal blood alcohol levels can be much lower than is allowed in the U.S.). Drug and alcohol use and abuse are also implicated in many assaults and accidents that happen abroad. Stay safe!

Observe the behavior of the host country nationals. Local habits can give you many clues to what is safe in a city and country. Don’t let your guard down as you become more familiar with your host city/country. Keep your wits about you at all times. Common sense is key!

Keep a low profile while living and traveling abroad – try not to be conspicuous in your dress (college t-shirts, baseball caps and sneakers are usually a sure sign you are from the U.S!), speech, or behavior. Try not to hang out with large groups of Americans, or at restaurants and clubs that tend to be hang-outs for visiting Americans. Exploring smaller neighborhood cafés and shops will give you a far better sense of how the locals live than you would get hanging out in tourists traps.

Traffic accidents are among the biggest safety risks to people traveling abroad. While the risk appears to be greatest in developing countries, students heading to all countries should be aware of road safety – as pedestrians, as drivers, and as passengers. Road safety information can be found on the web site of the Association for Safe International Road Travel and the Department of State.

Avoid crowds, protests, or other potentially volatile situations. It is also a good idea to avoid places (restaurants, clubs, etc.) where Americans are known to congregate – this includes the area around the U.S. Embassy in your host country.

Be aware of the emergency procedures put in place by your program and/or host university. Carry contact information for your program directors with you at all times – even when traveling.

When traveling away from your program site, always make certain the program, foreign university international student office, host family, and family back home know where you are going and when you are expected to return. You should provide these persons with itinerary as well as emergency contact information.

THE JOYS OF PACKING

General Packing Tips

- Pack an extra duffel in your suitcase for when you come home and have more stuff
- A day bag or a little backpack is a must for sightseeing
- Leave expensive jewelry at home

The electricity is different in every country; you will need an adapter and converter in order for your plug-ins to work. Do not bring a hair-dryer; you can buy an inexpensive one when you arrive.
If you choose to bring your laptop, it is your responsibility to make sure that you have the appropriate adaptors and property insurance for it. For those who wish to travel after the semester, keep in mind you will have to bring your laptop with you or pay to have it stored.

Luggage weight restrictions vary on each airline. Make sure you check the airline’s website for international restrictions. They may ask you to pay extra if you go over or they may ask you to remove things.

**On the Plane**

- Passport
- Copy of passport; keep it separate from where you keep your passport. Leave an additional copy at home with your family.
- A few toiletries – i.e. toothbrush, and change of clothes in case luggage is lost
- **DO NOT** pack daily medications in your checked luggage in case luggage is lost. Leave medications in original prescription bottles.

**Miscellaneous**

- Journal
- Extra passport photographs- sometimes needed to make Ids and discount cards
- A good book
- Travel book on country you are going to be in as well as a travel book
- Camera- extra camera battery and many memory cards
- MP4 or iPod
- Speakers to attach to your MP4 or Ipod
- Extra batteries (or rechargeable batteries) - they are expensive overseas!
- Money belt- wear when you are traveling under your clothes with your passport in it
- A TSA approved lock for your luggage and backpack.
- Change Purse (Many countries use lots of coins that are worth lots of money)
- Travel Alarm clock
- Umbrella
- Sunglasses
- Swiss army knife- make sure to pack in your checked bags, **NOT** your carry-on
- A few things to remind you of home

**What to Pack (depending on country it might change)**

The general rule should be when you are packing is if you don’t wear it here you won’t wear it there. Also don’t pack too much or don’t pack anything that needs to be dry cleaned or ironed. It’s better to layer up then to have bulky sweatshirts and sweaters. Nobody will care or notice if you wear the same jeans all the time or the same black pants.

Jeans
Shorts
Long Sleeve Shirts
T-shirt
Dress pants
Going out shirts
Sweatpants
Zip down sweatshirt
Bathing suit
Sneakers
Dress shoes
Flip flops or sandals  
Comfortable walking shoes  
Fleece  
Good Jacket  
Raincoat  
Belts  
Lots of Socks and Underwear  
Bras  
Scarf (very fashionable)  
Gloves  
1 or 2 Warm Bulky sweaters

Pack dark colors that won’t show dirt and don’t pack too many of one thing. Lay out all of your clothes on the bed or floor, now cut the pile in half, that is what you should bring. You will have to carry everything you bring. Trust me; you do not want to over pack!!

**Toiletries**

- If you have a prescription bring enough for the entire time and extra just in case  
- Contacts/ Glasses: Bring extra pair  
- Birth Control/condoms- make sure that if you are going to be sexually active you use contraception. Talk to your gynecologist about bringing a semester’s worth of birth control with you.  
- Toilet paper- for travel on the weekends  
- Small pack of tissues  
- You can buy refills for most things but if you will only use a particular brand of something then bring enough to last you the entire time  
- Hand sanitizer, so helpful when traveling!

**Good Things to Know**

- Talk to everyone and try things you normally wouldn’t do- you are abroad for a different experience so make it different  
- ASK FOR DIRECTIONS- don’t be shy.  
- Wander off the beaten path, go down side streets and explore the non-tourist sites  
- To save money eat off stands on the sides of the street and in supermarkets when traveling  
- Be very careful on subways; keep your hands in your pockets and your book bag on your front. People will try to pickpocket you.  
- Don’t carry your purse on the side of the street- someone might try to drive by and rip it from you  
- Use public transportation  
- Always ask for a discount  
- Never get on a train ride without food and water- a 1 hour train ride can turn into 4 if something breaks down  
- Double and triple check trains and flights times and if you need a reservation  
- When you get to a new city go to the tourist information center. It is normally located in the train stations or in airports. They all speak English and are very helpful  
- Always watch your bags, never put them on the back of a chair and never put them on the floor  
- Stay in youth hostels- it’s part of the experience when you travel and it’s a great way to meet people  
- Be careful and don’t trust shady looking people
MONEY

Some of the preparations need to be made while you are still at home. Be prepared with a combination of traveler’s checks, cash, and appropriate credit and bank cards.

Most of your major costs for the semester (tuition and fees, housing, and sometimes food or airfare) will usually be taken care of while at home.

After your major fees are paid you should try to create a budget and stick to it while abroad so you do not find yourself running out of money or unable to travel or complete the excursions you wished to do because of lack of funds.

Learn the local exchange rate and what options you have available to you for changing money. Avoid exchanging money at the airport because of high fees. Look for exchange vendors that may give discounts with a student ID.

- Exchange $100 before you depart, when you arrive use ATM machines to obtain local currency
- ATM cards and credit cards will provide you with the best exchange rate
- Contact your bank and credit card companies to let them know the dates you will be out of the country
- Verify with your bank that you can use your debit card overseas, and ask about withdrawal fees
- Contact your bank and credit cards and ask if they charge an international transaction fee.
- Make of an extra copy of credit card numbers, PIN numbers, ATM card, and leave it at home
- When using your ATM card or credit card, be very careful that someone isn’t around writing down your number.
- Put aside money when you arrive in your host country to be used for departure fees and day-of-travel expenses at the end of the semester.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are a good idea, but it is certainly not something that you must have. Some programs do provide cell phones or will offer cell phones at a discount rate. You can easily rent or buy a phone while you are abroad. They do not use contracts in the same way we do. You will buy or rent a phone and then purchase a SIM card which you will “top up” when it runs out of money. This is an easy pay as you go alternative to signing a contract. Many plans include free incoming calls from anywhere in the world if you do buy a cell phone. This option is usually the most cost-effective for long-term programs; former students and/or the program provider can provide details as to the best local stores and service plans.

You can take your tri-band or quad-band U.S. phone abroad with you. You should verify with your cell phone service provider that your phone will work in your program location. However, using a U.S. cell phone with a U.S. sim card is usually very expensive, even if you are able to purchase an international plan that reduces the calling rates. A sim-unlocked phone for which you can buy and use a locally purchased sim card is usually cheaper.

More students have been using Skype in recent years. Skype is a free way to communicate with friends and family back home. It requires both parties to have a Skype address and good internet access. If you wish to be seen and heard, both parties must have a microphone and speakers.
If you decide not to get a cell phone, there are calling cards and pay phones everywhere for you to use. Regular calling cards tend to be more expensive, but prepaid calling cards get you more minutes and allow you to add minutes as you need them. MCI and Sprint both have prepaid calling cards and can be bought just about anywhere in the US. Most drugstores, convenience stores, BJs, Costco’s, and supermarkets have varying versions of pre-paid calling cards.

USEFUL WEBSITES

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ARRIVAL

What is jet lag? In the first few days after your arrival, you are likely to experience physical changes as a result of taking a long flight and traveling through a number of time zones. You will probably be sleeping and waking at the 'wrong' times, feel tired, and have less patience than usual. This will pass within a few days. Upon arrival, get some exercise and do your best to wait to go to sleep until it is bedtime in the new time zone. This disorientation may be minimized some by avoiding alcohol and caffeinated products prior to and during your flight, and drinking plenty of other fluids.

Make sure you know how to get to your campus from the airport. Some programs will meet you at the airport and others will expect you to get to campus. Make sure you have these directions written down.

If you are living with a host family, it is appropriate to bring a gift with you. If you can bring something “American” they will appreciate it.
CULTURE

One of first things you will encounter when you go abroad is something you can’t really see, but which, if you don’t understand what it is and how it works, can seriously affect how you adjust to and enjoy your time overseas. That “thing” is CULTURE. The kind of culture we will address here is not at all the kind of thing one refers to when talking about being a “cultured person” or possessing a taste for modern art, champagne, and opera. Nor is culture the exclusive province of educated elite.

Culture is a neutral term, neither good nor bad, and refers to the broadest conception about the learned knowledge that humans use to fulfill their needs and wants. It refers to the collective historical patterns, values, societal arrangements, manners, ideas, and ways of living that people have used to order their society. It is comprised of all those things we learn as part of growing up including language, religion, beliefs about economic and social relations, political organization and legitimacy, and the thousands of “Do’s and Don'ts” society deems important that we know to become a functioning member of that group.

When you go abroad you immediately meet individuals, perhaps a bewildering variety of them, but you also enter another “culture.” The behaviors and attitudes you can externally observe in others are molded and motivated by their prior cultural learning, just as you have been molded by yours. You can’t see a person’s culture directly because feelings, judgments, and mental constructs are not always on display, although they may become evident through what people say or do.

Culture has been defined in literally hundreds of ways for different reasons. For study abroad purposes, culture can be most broadly defined as the shared sets of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors which are widely held by members of the host culture. A sojourner will not only need to be aware of these cultural patterns but will have to respond to them appropriately.

Culture has been aptly compared to an iceberg. Just as an iceberg has a visible section above the waterline and a larger, invisible section below the water line, so culture has some aspects that are observable and others that can only be suspected, imagined, or intuited. Also like an iceberg, the part of culture that is visible (observable behavior) is only a small part of a much bigger whole.

Critical incidents often revolve around a misunderstanding, a dispute, a linguistic error, or some other kind of cultural faux pas. They are the sorts of events that highlight different cultural assumptions and behaviors. They are about attitudes and behaviors that might (read “probably will”) be interpreted in different ways by different people, particularly when people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Thus, they help illustrate why you need to be aware of multiple cultural contexts in order to make sense of what happens between people when something goes wrong cross-culturally. Often what we consider “common sense” is seen in other cultures as neither common nor making much sense! And “just acting naturally” is seldom good enough or effective for very long as an adjustment strategy.

Figuring out how to “figure out” these kinds of things before one goes abroad will go a long way to help you determine “what just happened” and, more importantly, understand the “why.” It won’t prevent critical incidents from occurring, but it will allow you to laugh about most of them when you come home.
Making mistakes is inevitable. Things are not always what you think they are and the most ordinary interactions may occasionally take on a surreal quality. Why? Because the simplest things matter. Errors might arise from language mistakes in which your word choice in French or Swahili sends your audience into gales of laughter or shocked silence! Or you use the wrong hand (who knew there was a “right hand”?) to pass food at a meal in India and your host looks at you like you just did something really gross.

A good start towards figuring this all out begins by acknowledging that:

a. they have a culture
b. you have a culture
c. some things in their culture will be similar (or may seem familiar) to yours
d. some things will be different (maybe in ways you can’t even imagine!)
e. one of your main jobs while abroad is to figure out for the new culture:
   what those differences are…
   where they come from…
   what they mean…
   and how you are going to respond when conflict or misunderstandings arise.

**BEING AN AMERICAN ABROAD**

In order to understand your host culture, it is best to look at your own culture first. What makes us American? Why do we fall into certain stereotypes?

It is important to recognize your "Americanness" and to think about what cultural attitudes and values you will be carrying abroad.

**Personal control over the environment** - Americans do not generally believe in the power of fate; they see this as superstitious and reflective of an unwillingness to take initiative. Life's problems tend to be viewed as coming from one's laziness or unwillingness to take responsibility, rather than from bad luck.

**Change** - Americans tend to see change as good, leading to development, improvement, and progress. More traditional cultures see change as destructive; they value stability and tradition.

**Time** - Time is of utmost importance to Americans. Time is something to be on, kept, filled, saved, lost, wasted, and even killed. Americans tend to be more concerned with getting things done on time than they are with interpersonal relationships. Americans stop discussions abruptly in order to make appointments on time and to be productive.

**Equality and fairness** - Equality is so valued in American culture that it is seen as having a religious basis. At least in theory, Americans believe that all people are created equal and that everyone should have equal opportunities.

**Individualism and interdependence** - Americans tend to view themselves as highly individualistic and resist being thought of as part of any homogenous group. Individualism leads to privacy, which most Americans highly value. It is interesting to note that the word for "privacy" does not even exist in many non-Western languages.

**Self-help and initiative** - Americans tend to take credit for accomplishments as individuals, and they tend to value the "self-made" man or woman.

**Competition** - Americans tend to believe that competition brings out the best in people, and "free enterprise" is valued in many areas of life.

**Future orientation** - Americans tend to value the future, devalue the past, and to an extent, are unaware
of the present. Many Americans work so hard and think so much about their future that a perfectly happy present often goes unnoticed.

**Action/work orientation** - Americans tend to see any action as superior to inaction. Americans tend to schedule an active life and schedule in time for relaxation. Often the first question people ask each other when meeting is, "What do you do?" meaning what is their profession.

**Informality** - Americans are more informal than many other cultures. For example, many Americans call their bosses by their first names, dress is more casual even at formal events, and even greetings are casual (e.g., "Hi" rather than, "Hello, how are you?").

**Directness, openness, and honesty** - Americans tend to prefer the direct approach to delivering information, no matter how unpleasant. Americans tend to see honesty as most important, and anyone who uses an intermediary to deliver unpleasant information is seen as manipulative and untrustworthy.

**Practicality and efficiency** - The reputation of Americans is practical and efficient. They tend to value rational and objective decisions over emotional and subjective ones, and the pragmatic approach is the overwhelming philosophy.

**Materialism and acquisitiveness** - Foreigners tend to consider Americans to be very materialistic. Americans tend to give high priority to obtaining, maintaining, and protecting material objects, and they value newness and innovation.

**Dealing with anti-American sentiment** - There may be times when you feel as though you are being attacked personally for being an American. Sometimes you will be expected to answer questions about American foreign policy and to justify the actions of your government that you may or may not agree with. There is no right or wrong way to deal with anti-American slurs or suggestions, and you will certainly develop your own strategy for addressing these issues. However, some suggestions are not to reinforce the negative American stereotypes with your own behavior, and to try to understand the motives of the person criticizing you and your country. Ask more questions to try to understand why the person believes what s/he does. Most importantly, remain tolerant and avoid becoming defensive; keep an open mind and use the experience to learn about yourself and about cultural differences.

Particularly in the post-9/11 environment, students are encouraged to prepare themselves for conversations about U.S. foreign policies and the reasons behind them by brushing up on American political and cultural history. It is also critical to understand the current U.S. foreign policy towards the country you will be studying in, as well as that country's current political climate. A well-informed student will be better able to engage himself/herself thoughtfully in conversations with host country nationals rather than taking criticism of U.S. policy as a personal attack or insult.

**POP QUIZ**

It is important that you learn about your host country and brush up on American history and politics. U.S. college students are surprised at the amount of cultural, historical, and political discussions they get into overseas, and they return saying they wish they had done some reading before they left.

1. What is the currency of your host country?
2. What is the capital of your host country?
3. List one cultural icon from your host country. (i.e. author, painter, musician.)
4. What countries border your host country?
5. What is the current form of government in your host country?
6. List one political figure from your host country.
7. What is the current political climate of your host country?
8. How do the people of your host country view America?
9. What is the predominant religion?
10. What is the national sport or pastime?
11. What are your thoughts on President Obama?
12. In the education system, what kind of learning is most valued?