

# Pre-Departure: What to Expect When Abroad

Congratulations on your decision to study overseas! Now that you are coming closer to departing for your study abroad program, it is time to begin thinking about the experience you will want to have and preparing yourself for your summer, semester, or academic year abroad. Here is some information that will help you get ready to go.

## School and Courses

Even though you are in a foreign country with a lot of interesting new things to be discovered, you are still a student first and a tourist last. The grades received by your host institution will be your grades.

**Overseas Orientation:** All students are required to attend orientation at the start of the program. At orientation you will be introduced to the city, university, academic program, housing and other practical concerns, and you will have a chance to get to know the other participants. A language proficiency exam will also be administered during orientation, (for language programs). ***Orientation date and time will be provided in your program specific pre-departure information.***

**Coursework /course length:** Students may find that there is a lot less “busy work” and students are required to do a fair amount of studying/learning on their own. Remember, questions like “what is going to be on the test?” and “what is the makeup of the test like?” are often not acceptable. You will be held accountable for the grades on your tests and very seldom is extra credit offered. Students may also encounter different teaching styles. Not all professors will use the latest technology and students are expected to adapt.

**Evaluation:** It is not uncommon that course grades are based solely on a midterm test or paper and a final. These determine your final grade. Again, there may not be much homework that is submitted every day. Take them seriously as typically they are the only forms of evaluation given out through the semester.

## Housing

Students will only be allowed to move into their program-arranged accommodations on the official start date of the program. Students choosing to arrive before (or depart after) the official program dates are responsible for securing their own housing arrangements. Please follow all rules set forth by the residence hall directors, host families or landlords. Residence halls abroad may have stricter rules than what you may be used to at your home campus. Remember, if you break something, it will be taken out of your security deposit.



**Residence Halls:** Residence halls abroad do not carry the same concept as their American counterparts. Residences are for sleeping and studying. Students who live here can be from any school throughout the city and the “community” living atmosphere is not as prevalent as in the US. Students usually gather in public places and enjoy the city as opposed to partying in their rooms. Keep in mind that your peers can be very studious and prefer a quiet living environment.

**Host Family:** Students staying with host families should follow the rules set forth by the family and respect the family’s property. If there are any serious issues that you cannot resolve by sitting down and speaking with the family, please inform your program director.

**Apartments:** If you are in an apartment, you will be responsible for keeping it clean and in the condition it was when you moved in. Abide by all rules set forth by the landlord and do not leave any reason for your deposit to not be returned to you.

**Hotels:** If staying in a hotel, note that there will be other guests around. Be respectful of common spaces and limit the noise level at night.

## Travel

Once you have made your flight arrangements, complete the **Flight & Arrival Form** on your online account. If you choose to arrive prior to the start date of the program, it is your responsibility to arrange your arrival to the designated meeting place for your program. Note: please remember to bring your program contact information.



When traveling pay attention to all security regulations, especially when flying or visiting major attractions. Plan for extra time when traveling and never carry anything on a plane that was given to you by someone else.

**Customs and Immigration:** Upon arrival to your destination, you will first go through immigration and customs. The immigration officer will ask you to present your passport and student or tourist visa (if applicable). The officer will then stamp an entry approval on the passport and give it back to you. Next, you will go to claim your personal luggage.

**Student Visa Reminder:** Bring all paperwork associated with obtaining your visa with you (or scan it to your email) to your destination in case you should be asked to provide documentation. If you haven't scheduled your student visa appointment please do so immediately.

**Important Documents:** Make at least 3 copies of your passport. One copy should be left at home with your parents, place one in your luggage, and one copy should be kept with you at all times while overseas. You should also bring with you another type of identification such as a license or student identification. Make sure to make copies of each piece of identification and leave a copy at home with your parents.

**Jet lag and culture shock:** There is the likelihood that many students will experience culture shock and jet lag. Be prepared to be grouchy, irritable, disoriented and full of regret during your first few days. This is normal. It is a combination of being out of your normal sleep routine and being surrounded by a culture with which you are not familiar. Take it easy, eat healthy and get enough sleep (during local sleeping times) and this should pass with time.

You also will be confronted with many new cultural situations. This can be overwhelming and it is recommended that student (and parents) understand that this stage of **culture shock** is very normal and expected. It is also possible that students may experience symptoms of culture shock, not immediately, but after a period of time. Remember, you may either contact your in-country Program Director or your program specialist if any serious matter needs to be attended to.

### **Extra-Program Travel:**

Students making plans for travel that are not a part of the program should notify their program director or in-country international office before their departure. Also, students should check prior to departure to see if there are any visa requirements for the host country (i.e. your visa process if fully complete) or the destination country. **Students are encouraged to register your side trips on your Oswego study abroad account using the My Trip Tool.**



## Communication

Please make it a point to communicate with your parents or support system at home. Listed below are various ways in which you can keep in contact with home.

**Cell phones** can be purchased at your destination and you can pay-as-you-go. It is not recommended that you use your phone and provider from the US. The service charges will be too expensive. However, if you do not want to give up your service, you may contact your provider for international phone options and packages.

**Sim Cards vs Prepaid Plans:** Sim Cards are pay as you go cards that can be purchased when you arrive abroad and put into your smart phone. This tends to be the most affordable option. Your American prepaid plan can get pricey while abroad, but may offer data, text and calling. Check with your provider to see if you this is something you are interested in. With either of these options, be sure the plan will work in more than just your host country if you plan on traveling elsewhere while you are abroad.

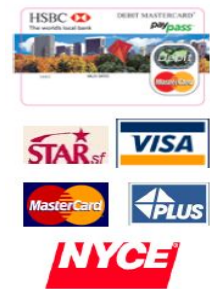
**Skype / Other Apps:** Popular way for students to contact their family and friends back home. Some popular ones are Skype, WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook Messenger. You can also use iMessage, Facetime Audio/Video with iPhones. Remember that internet access might not be as prevalent as you may be used to in the U.S. Use apps such as Map Wifi & Wifi Finder or Wifi Finder Free to find local wifi hotspots. You can save maps and other helpful information offline using the Google Trips app.

**Internet accessibility:** While in most destinations you will have internet and “wifi” access, the availability will not be as prevalent as you may be used to. In residence halls, access may be available in the common areas and sometimes in the rooms. It is harder to adapt an older building for internet but, on a positive note, this encourages students to be out and social with the other students. There are also cybercafés that you can use as well as “wifi” zones at participating restaurants. Most international restaurants will offer wifi for a small fee.

If you are in independent or host family housing without internet access, you may purchase an internet card at one of the mobile phone providers for a monthly fee. You will be able to inquire in detail about this during your in-country orientation sessions.

## Finances Abroad

It is recommended that you have a debit or credit card with widely recognized symbols on the back. Some samples of these are shown. Once you are overseas, you just need to match up one of your card's logos to the logos shown on the ATM to withdraw money. Remember, when you withdraw money from the ATM in your host country, you are withdrawing in that country's currency. **Note: You should contact your bank to inform them that you will be abroad. This will prevent your bank from deactivating your card.**



Using a credit card for large purchases will get you the best exchange rate. The best credit card will be one with no foreign transaction fees. Cash is usually better for small purchases. **Discover Card** and **American Express** are not widely accepted abroad.

**MoneyGrams/Western Union** can be used to send money in the event of an emergency.

**Traveler's checks** can be a hassle. It is recommended that you avoid them.

**Paypal** can be used to have money from home sent to you. It is quick and easy.

**Places to exchange currency:** Your local bank - must order in advance.

Airports - you will be charged a commission.

Any exchange booths throughout your host city.

**'In case' money:** It is recommended that you have some host country currency with you before your departure. Generally, it is around the equivalent of \$150-\$200. This is in case you arrive at a different time than expected or are not being met at the airport; you can take a taxi to your accommodations.

## Health and Safety

Nothing is more important than your own health. Make sure that you have taken care of any necessary medical or dental procedures before you leave, including check-ups. Inform your director immediately about any health problem that concerns or may prevent you from participating in the program. Report all serious illnesses to the program director. *If you need help, please request it.*

**Overseas Insurance:** You will automatically be enrolled in the mandatory SUNY study abroad health coverage through United Health Care (UHC) which includes health insurance coverage AND emergency assistance coverage including evacuation and repatriation benefits. Information on the policy can be found at [www.uhcsr.com](http://www.uhcsr.com)

### How to Access your Insurance Card:

You will be enrolled by the Office of International Education and Programs approximately 2-4 weeks prior to departure. Once you are enrolled, you will receive an email to the address you have provided on your study abroad application. This email will come from [notifications@uhcsr.com](mailto:notifications@uhcsr.com). Please note this email may go directly to your spam folder, so please add this email to your contacts. Once you receive your email, please follow the steps below:

1. Visit <https://myaccount.uhcsr.com>. A link should be included in your email.
2. Click "Create Account".
3. Enter your information. Your student ID number is the ID number you provided on your study abroad application.

Within this account, you can access your card and print it. You will not be receiving a hard copy card so it is your responsibility to log in and retrieve a copy for your records. This insurance begins the date of your departure from the US, so it is recommended you take care of this before you leave so that this information is accessible during your travels. This insurance will end on the last day of your program. If you wish to extend coverage, please contact UHC directly.

### Additional Features:

Learn about local health facilities and doctors before you go. Both the U.S. State Department and UHC websites provide guidance in finding medical facilities and doctors abroad. Note that you cannot access the UHC site until you have been enrolled in the insurance and activated an account. If you have questions prior to that please contact our office. Once you are enrolled in UHC and have set up an account on the UHC site, familiarize yourself with all the services and resources they provide before you go.

### Keep in Mind:

Think carefully before canceling other health insurance you may have. SUNY study abroad health insurance coverage is not valid in the US. We recommend that you keep some sort of domestic health insurance in effect in case you need to return home unexpectedly from abroad for any reason.

**Medications:** If you are currently on any medication, please consider filling a prescription for the entire duration of your stay abroad. If you are abroad for a semester or longer, please have your doctor provide you with a letter explaining (for the customs agent) why you will be carrying a large quantity of medication on your person. Also, please be sure to travel with the medication in your carry-on (this include syringes).

**Vaccinations and Immunizations:** Depending on where you study, there may be recommended vaccinations and immunizations for that region. You may view the latest recommendations from the Center for Disease Control's website at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>

**Intestinal and stomach problems:** The best way to protect yourself is to bring along some over-the-counter medication and to be very careful about what you eat. If you have diarrhea accompanied by severe abdominal cramps, blood in your stool, or fever, contact the program director immediately and go to a doctor.



**Sunburn and Heat:** If you do not wear sunscreen you will get sunburned. You will be exposed to the sun; be prepared by wearing a hat, using sunblock, and wearing sunglasses. If you get sunburned, be sure to cover up any affected area when you go outside.

Make sure you drink lots of fluids. If you feel dizziness, exhaustion, cramps, and headaches you may be dehydrated. Excessive sweating, extreme headaches, and disorientation leading to possible convulsions and delirium are the symptoms of heat stroke, which can be fatal. If you have any of these symptoms GET TO A HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY!

**Alcohol use:** The legal drinking age is lower in many study abroad destinations. Observe the local attitudes towards alcohol consumption. It is very common to drink as a form of socialization but not as common to drink in order to get drunk.

**Drug use:** NO. Do not buy, use, or possess illegal drugs while abroad. No one, neither SUNY Oswego, nor your Director, nor the U.S. government can help you if you are arrested for violating drug laws while abroad.



**Pick pocketing / Petty theft:** Unfortunately, pickpocketing and petty theft are common in the majority of destinations abroad. It is most likely to happen in touristic areas; please be aware that it can happen anywhere. Be extra vigilant not just of your personal possessions (such as your wallet, purse, credit cards, money, jewelry, identification) but more importantly of yourself. Please ensure your own safety and take all necessary precautions not to fall victim to this. Do not leave any of your items unattended; doing so is asking for trouble! Pickpockets love pubs, clubs, bars, beaches, touristic areas, the metro, and areas where large amounts of individuals are congregated. Be extra vigilant for yourself and your belongings.

Be aware of the distraction techniques used by pickpockets. Often thieves or accomplices will present themselves as genuine by approaching you to ask for directions or by accidentally bumping into you. When this happens your awareness is lowered and thieves will take advantage of this. The best way to protect yourself is to treat everyone who approaches you with caution and always hold on tightly to your purse, bag, or wallet. Above all else, never assume that you are too savvy to fall victim to a pickpocket!

*(Information on petty theft adapted from CAPA London pre-departure information)*

**Transportation:** Always take official taxis, buses, or trains. Do not hitchhike.

## Emergencies

For emergencies, you want to first contact your in-country program director or the authorities. They will be the first to assist you in getting the help you need.

**What constitutes an emergency?** Emergencies are defined as providing an immediate threat to the safety and well-being of the student. Some instances include:

- you are assaulted or hurt and need to go to the hospital
- you are arrested
- there is a regional disturbance

Instances that **DO NOT** constitute an emergency include:

- you get lost (and are not in harm's way)
- you lose your wallet/purse

## Worst Case Scenarios

While we don't like to talk about it, planning ahead for a bad situation will be less stressful if you have already organized a plan of action ahead of time.

**'In case' money:** It is recommended that you have some host country currency with you before your departure. Generally it is around the equivalent of \$150-\$200.

**Disturbances occur:** Contact your program director for instruction.

**You lose your wallet/purse:** Have the number to your credit card company written down in another place so you can contact them immediately.

**You lose your passport:** Make copies of your passport; leave one with your parents and keep one. This will aid you in getting a replacement.

**You need to go to the hospital:** Find out who the cooperating physician with your insurance company is and have their information handy. Have emergency contact information in your purse or wallet for others to quickly contact the in-country Program Director and your family. Also, make a special "Emergency" number in your cell phone.

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## What To Pack

**Clothing and Packing:** Travel light! It is tempting to bring every article of clothing and every personal belonging that is important to you. Resist the temptation to do this. Flying is stressful, security is tighter than ever, and your housing arrangements will be different and almost certainly smaller than you are used to, so don't over pack!

Most airlines allow you to bring at least one checked bag weighing 50 lbs or less when traveling overseas. Confirm the regulations with your airline company. When packing, keep in mind the temperatures that you will be experiencing while abroad (i.e. semester students may need to pack for multiple seasons). Clothes that can easily transition from one season to the other are recommended.

**Adaptor or Converter?** Adaptors allow your electronics to be used by allowing the prongs on the plug to fit to the local electrical outlet. Adaptors DO NOT change the current feeding into your electronics. You will either need to purchase travel-grade electronics that allow you to switch from 110w to 220 or purchase a converter. Converters change the electrical output to allow your electronics to function properly. These sets usually come with various adaptors to be used around the world. The average cost of these are \$25 and can be found at any travel shop or superstore (Walmart, Target or Best Buy).



Example of Adaptor Set



Example of Converter

**Nostalgia:** Bring anything that 'you can't live without'. Items such as peanut butter or your favorite shampoo may not be so easy to find or economical abroad.

## Packing List

Below is a list of suggested items to bring overseas. This is not an exhaustive list nor is it mandatory that students bring these items. Also keep in mind the climate and type of program you are participating in. While some of these items can easily be purchased in some countries, they may not be as accessible in others. Please check with your program specialist for details.

**Bath/Hygiene:** anti-bacterial hand gel, contact lens solution, flip-flops for the shower and walking around, towel/bathrobe, feminine hygiene items, toiletries (soap, shampoo, razors, deodorant), toilet paper\*, hair dryer

**Clothing:** washable clothes, bathing suit, socks, underwear, pajamas, sunglasses, rain gear (umbrella), comfortable walking shoes, sneakers, sandals, winter or summer gear.

- Casual, comfortable, light, loose fitting clothing and washable cotton clothes
- 2-3 nice outfits (may be needed if you go out to a conference, fancy nightclub, or restaurant)
- **DO NOT** bring valuable jewelry or clothing that needs special care!



**Miscellaneous:** Pocket dictionary, travel alarm clock, backpack for overnight field trips, flashlight and batteries\* (not in carry-on bag), bottle opener\*, digital camera, locks for suitcases, money belt, pens, pencils, notebooks (general school supplies), portable phone charger, map of area.

Linens (At least one fitted sheet and flat sheet. Also, bring one pillowcase. Note that your host family or residence hall likely provides linens but it is advised that you bring at least one set)\*

**Convenience:** travel iron,, a journal for writing down your thoughts, a book or two of your interest, a second pair of eyeglasses, a small calendar, trip bucket list.

**Other ideas:** Pictures, posters, map to decorate the walls of your room, anything that makes you feel great and happy when you are away from home.

*\*Recommended for students going to Cuba*

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