

Study Abroad Pre-Departure Guide

A Resource for WVU Students Studying Abroad



Office of International Programs

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The Office of International Programs wants to congratulate you on your decision to study abroad. We are happy to hear that you are taking advantage of this life-changing experience!

This guide has been created to be a resource to help prepare you for your study abroad experience. Be sure to take it with you as it contains useful information which you will need while abroad. We have included information on required pre-departure procedures at WVU as well as other considerations to help you make the most of your experience abroad.

If you have any questions or concerns as you prepare for your experience, or while you are abroad, please do not hesitate to contact our office at: 1 (304) 293-6955 or via e-mail at: oiip@mail.wvu.edu. Our emergency 24-hour cell phone number is: 1 (304) 276-2682.

From everyone at the WVU Office of International Programs, we want to wish you an exciting, rewarding and enriching study abroad experience!

Table of Contents

PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| Required Documents..... | 4 |
| Optional Documents..... | 5 |
| Health Issues..... | 7 |
| Support Services..... | 11 |
| Health Insurance..... | 12 |
| Safety Issues..... | 12 |
| Money..... | 15 |
| Travel Issues..... | 16 |
| Research Your New Home..... | 18 |
| Packing..... | 20 |
| Communicating with Home..... | 21 |

CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Intercultural Communication..... | 22 |
| Cultural Adjustment..... | 23 |
| Customs Information..... | 26 |
| Reverse Culture Shock..... | 28 |
| Remaining a World Citizens..... | 29 |

This handbook was adapted from the "Pre-Departure Guide: A Resource for Pitt Study Abroad Students" published by the University of Pittsburgh Study Abroad Office.

Preparations for Departure

Required Documents

A. OIP Forms:

Please make sure the following forms, available on our Web site (<http://www.wvu.edu/~intlprog/forms.html>), are received by OIP at least **two weeks** prior to your departure:

- ✓ **Student Information Page**
- ✓ **Study Abroad Contract**
- ✓ **Transient Form**
- ✓ **Administrative Fee Agreement**
- ✓ **Confidential Health Information with Physician's Statement**
- ✓ **Travel Vaccinations and Inoculations**
- ✓ **Proof of Insurance**
- ✓ **Photocopy of Passport**

B. Passport

U.S. citizens must have a passport to travel outside the United States. You should apply as soon as possible to avoid any delays. The Passport Agency normally takes *six to eight weeks* to process your passport application. If you are under a time constraint, there is an **Expedited Service** available for an additional fee.

If you already have a passport, please check that it has not expired and that it is valid for at least six months beyond your planned return to the United States. If you applied for your passport at the age of 16 or older, it is valid for 10 years.

Remember that your passport is your most important legal document while you are outside the U.S.—treat it with special care. **Keep a Xerox copy of the identification page of your passport in a separate location from the passport itself. You should also leave a copy with your parent or guardian in case your passport is lost or stolen.**

U.S. Passport Applications are available online at http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html

Directions on How to Apply for a U.S. Passport

- Read the instructions **located on the back** of the passport application.
- Fill out the white areas on the front of the passport application. Answer all questions, but **DO NOT SIGN IT**. Do not fold, staple or erase on the form.
- **Passport-size photos** can be purchased at almost any camera store, drugstore or AAA.

- **Proof of Identity:** the passport application requires an original or certified birth certificate and a valid state or federal photo I.D., such as your driver's license. Consult the instructions on the back of the passport application for special instructions regarding Naturalized citizens, U.S. citizens who were born abroad, and citizens who have no birth record.
- Take the completed Passport Application, two passport-size photos, proof of identity and the **Passport fee** to your local main **Post Office** to complete the application. **YOU MUST DO THIS IN PERSON.**

C. *Visa*

Most countries require a student visa before allowing you to enter. Each country has its own regulations, so if your program sponsor does not provide the necessary information, check with the closest consulate regarding specific visa requirements.

Like the passport application, the visa application and process can take several weeks so don't wait until the last minute. Delays in obtaining a visa may cause you to miss your flight. Standard items usually required in the application are:

- Visa application form
- A current, valid passport
- One or more passport-type photographs
- The visa application fee
- Letter of acceptance from the host institution

In addition, you may be required to provide evidence of financial support during the period of time you will be studying abroad, proof of medical insurance and/or a medical exam.

Initial information for each country is available at <http://embassy.org/embassies>.

Optional Documents

A. *The International Student Identification Card (ISIC)*

The International Student Identification Card, offered by STA Travel, is widely recognized and accepted throughout the world. Students enjoy discounts on travel, museum and cultural site entrance fees, as well as Travel Guard Assistance, which assists with the replacement of a lost passport and/or advancing funds for medical treatment, etc. The ISIC application and card is available at the Office of International Programs.

To apply, you will need the following items:

- TWO passport size photos
- Photo I.D. such as a driver's license or passport
- \$22.00 in cash (we do not accept checks or credit cards) for the ISIC card fee
- Verification of enrollment. Acceptable verification includes:
 - A transcript indicating degree-seeking status and dated for the fall, spring or summer semesters of the current academic year.
 - A receipt showing that full tuition has been paid for the fall, spring or summer semesters of the current academic year, dated and stamped by the Bursar.

- A letter from Admissions and Records stating that you are enrolled for the current academic year and working towards a degree.

More information about the benefits of the ISIC card is available from the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE.) CIEE can be reached at 1-800-2COUNCIL, or consult their Web site at <http://www.ciee.org/>.

B. Absentee Voting

In order to vote from abroad, you must first be registered to vote at home. Check with your local city or town hall to obtain information on procedures for voting by absentee ballot. Remember to make note of your party, ward, district and voter registration number. If necessary, your absentee ballot can be notarized at a US Embassy or Consulate.

For more information, visit www.votefromabroad.org

C. Income Tax Information

Attention Year Abroad and Spring Semester Program Participants: If you have earnings which require you to file federal, state and local income tax returns, remember that you will be out of the country between January 1 and April 15. Although people temporarily living abroad may request an extension on the deadline for filing federal income tax, the extension is usually only until June 15. The best advice is to contact the American Consulate or Embassy in your host country for information on your tax obligations. You can file from abroad if you make arrangements with your parents to send you the necessary state and federal forms and other documentation. **The Office of International Programs cannot provide this service.**

D. Power of Attorney

If your signature is needed for any official or legal documents, such as financial aid monies, you should make arrangements for “power of attorney” to be held by an appropriate person to act on your behalf. You can request a POA by visiting your local notary to fill out the correct documentation. Make sure to have the document notarized.

For more information, contact Student Legal Services in E Moore Hall at (304) 293-4897.

E. Medical Power of Attorney

You may also wish to complete a medical “power of attorney”. A Medical Power of Attorney is a document that designates a person to make health care decisions on your behalf should you be unable to make such decisions.

For more information, contact Student Legal Services in E Moore Hall at (304) 293-4897.

F. Property Insurance

Student travelers should consider travel insurance to cover the loss of money due to trip interruption or cancellation, as well as loss of baggage and personal items while traveling or living abroad. Note that many homeowners' insurance policies contain a clause about this coverage extending worldwide. Normally a copy of a police report filed at the time of loss or theft will be required by the insurer before any claim will be considered.

Health Issues

When studying abroad your health and nutrition is a primary concern, since health and disease conditions vary worldwide. Natives have natural immunities against the bacteria and viral infections common in their areas whereas many travelers do not. Bacteria foreign to the traveler can have a detrimental effect on his or her health abroad.

Everyone's body reacts differently to new environments. Some people gain weight, others lose it. Some are nauseated from trying new foods, while others can eat anything without getting sick. It may take a few weeks for your body to adjust to the new ingredients you will be eating. Nevertheless, don't let your fears get in the way of tasting new foods—that is half the fun of learning a new culture. You may want to take your favorite over-the-counter medicines (i.e., aspirin or upset stomach tablets) for the first few weeks until you are comfortable with the surroundings and language. **Make sure all medication is in its original sealed package when traveling overseas.**

Women, check with returnees concerning the availability and quality of feminine hygiene products in the country in which you will be living. You may find them difficult to purchase and/or extremely expensive. Take a supply to hold you over until you are comfortable enough with your surroundings and language to prevent unnecessary discomfort.

Going abroad is not a “geographic cure” for concerns and problems at home. Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go. In particular, if you are concerned about your use of alcohol and other controlled substances, or if you have an emotional health concern, you should address it honestly before making plans to travel. Contrary to many people's expectations, traveling does not minimize these problems—in fact, it often exacerbates them to a crisis stage.

Things to Take with You:

- Health insurance identification
- Health records (i.e., surgical/illness history, drug-related or allergies, blood type, special medications, etc.)
- International certificates (i.e., vaccination record.) These are available through the WVU International Travel Clinic
- Copies of your prescriptions (including eye glasses)
- Personal travel health kit

A. Immunizations

Different countries often require certain vaccinations before entry. The U.S. State Department (<http://www.travel.state.gov>) issues Consular Information Sheets regarding entry requirements and medical facilities. The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also provides detailed information on their Web site (www.cdc.gov), as well as a list of routine, required and recommended vaccinations for Americans traveling overseas. A foreign country's regulations are usually more concerned with the health of their own citizenry rather than with your health — they primarily want to insure that you are not a carrier of a disease, not whether you will contract a disease while you are there.

Make an appointment with your physician at least three months prior to your departure for vaccinations. Some vaccinations require six to eight weeks to take effect.

For more information, contact the WVU International Travel Clinic online at <http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/shs/services/internationaltravel.asp> or by calling (304) 293-1379.

B. Health Certificate

First, **your immunization record will not be valid if it is not recorded on the International Health Certificate** available from the CDC and approved by the World Health Organization (WHO.) It must be completed in detail. If incomplete or inaccurate, you risk being denied entry or revaccination at the border. Check with your physician to ensure he or she is aware of the International Health Regulations adopted by WHO. Your doctor needs to possess a "Uniform Stamp" to validate your International Health Certificate. The best resources are travel clinics, usually associated with university medical centers or public health departments.

C. Medication

If you are currently taking medication, be sure to take enough for the duration of your stay. You may not be able to find the same medication overseas. Due to customs regulations, **leave all medications in their original labeled containers.** Also, keep an original copy of the doctor's prescription with your passport. These materials will assist you through customs and insure that you won't break any laws of the country you are entering. **If the medication contains narcotic substances, consult the consulate of the country where you will be studying to see if it's legal.**

- Take your own syringes if you require regular injections.
- If you have a special medical condition (including allergies to medications,) it is a good idea to buy a medical alert bracelet.
- Beware of buying prescription drugs over the counter in the country where you will be living. Always ask careful questions about what you are purchasing.

D. Staying Healthy

To help ensure that you have a healthy study abroad experience, please adhere to the following guidelines suggested by the CDC.

Do:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Drink only bottled water or carbonated drinks. **Avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice cubes.** Cholera, Hepatitis A and Typhoid Fever are some diseases carried by food and water.
- Only eat thoroughly cooked foods or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Avoid fruits and vegetables that do not have peels.
- If you are visiting an area where there is risk for malaria, take your malaria prevention medication before, during and after travel, as directed.
- Protect yourself from insects by remaining in well-screened areas, using repellents and by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants from dusk to dawn. Many diseases, such as malaria, are transmitted by mosquito bites.
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep your feet clean and dry and do not go barefoot.
- Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other STDs.

Don't:

- Don't eat food purchased from street vendors.
- Don't eat dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Don't share needles with anyone.
- Don't handle animals, especially monkeys, dogs, and cats. Avoid bites to prevent serious diseases such as rabies and plague.
- Don't swim in fresh water. Salt water is usually safer.

E. Additional Medical Information

HIV, AIDS and SEXUAL SAFETY:

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a severe, often life-threatening illness caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV.) The incubation period for AIDS ranges from a few months to years. Currently, there is no vaccine to protect against the HIV infection, nor is there a cure.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 47 million people are infected with HIV worldwide. Because the HIV and AIDS are globally distributed, the risk to international travelers is determined less by their geographic destination than by their sexual and drug using behaviors.

HIV is preventable because it is fragile, and can only be transferred through blood or other body fluids: sexual intercourse, needle or syringe sharing, medical use of blood or blood components and from an infected woman to her baby. **HIV infection is becoming increasingly heterosexual.** HIV is not transmitted through casual contact, air, food or water products, contact with inanimate objects, or through mosquitoes and other insects. **Specifically, students studying abroad should be aware of condom quality, HIV**

antibody testing, clean blood supplies, sterile needles, and medical facilities in the target country.

Some countries deny entry to persons with AIDS and those whose test positive for HIV. Check with the embassy or the country you plan to visit for regulations or contact the State Department Office of Public Affairs at (202) 647-1488. Keep in mind, however, that U.S. test results are not always accepted by other countries. **Also, note that individuals in other countries may not be educated to the same degree regarding Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs.)**

Condom Caution: Condoms, when used consistently and correctly, prevent transmission of HIV. Condoms may be difficult to acquire and of lesser quality, particularly in Eastern Europe and in parts of the developing world. Take responsibility for yourself. The best prevention is abstinence. However, you may want to bring condoms with you, even if you are not planning on being sexually active while abroad. Free condoms are available from the Monongalia Health Department or at a discounted price from WVU Student Health.

Clean blood supplies: In the USA, Australia, Canada, Japan and Western Europe, the risk of infection with HIV through a blood transfusion is greatly reduced because of mandatory testing of all donated blood for the presence of antibodies to HIV. Other countries may not have a formal program for testing blood and sterile single-use disposable needles may not be available.

If you do need a blood transfusion due to blood loss while abroad, the blood should be tested, if at all possible, for HIV antibodies by properly trained laboratory technicians using a reliable test. If this is not possible, you should ask for a **Colloid or Crystalloid Plasma Expander**, which increases blood volume without the use of possibly contaminated blood supplies. If you provide assistance to an injured person while abroad, vigorously wash your hands if exposed to HIV. Students should also use gloves for protection.

Additional Resources for Information:

- US Department of Health and Human Services: (800) 342-AIDS
- US State Department AIDS Hotline: (800) 367-2437
- Center for Disease Control National AIDS Information Clearinghouse: (404) 332-4559 or (800) 458-5231

Malaria:

Information on Malaria risk in specific countries can be obtained from the CDC Web site (www.cdc.gov.) There are several different strains of malaria. Your doctor should advise you on the best anti-malaria drugs depending on the country in which you will be living. No vaccine is completely effective or safe, and some may cause adverse reactions from minor to major illness depending on the individual.

Dengue:

According to the CDC, Dengue fever is the newest traveler's disease and has spread rapidly in the last 20 years. The disease is usually benign and self-limiting. There is no vaccine or specific treatment available. It is transmitted by the Aedes mosquito, which prefers to feed on humans during the day. Travelers should use protective measures such as mosquito netting and insect repellent for exposed skin.

Support Services

A. AA World Services

AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) World Services is located in New York City. Contact a representative at (212) 870-3400. Members of AA, who are going overseas, may access International AA Directory information online at www.alcoholics-anonymous.org. Also, any phonebook in any country will have AA services listed in the first few pages.

B. Counseling Services

If you are currently seeing a counselor for any reason, it is important to inform your Study Abroad Advisor and counselor prior to departure. This is to ensure that the proper services are available for you at the host institution.

For more information, contact the WVU Carruth Center for Counseling and Psychological Services Center at (304) 293-4431.

C. Disability

If you have a disability, it is necessary to consult with a Study Abroad Advisor and a counselor in the WVU Disability Services Office at (304) 293-6700 to determine the most appropriate study abroad program for you. Mobility International (<http://www.miusa.org>) provides helpful information for students with disabilities.

For more information on Mobility International, contact (304) 343-1284.

Health Insurance

All WVU study abroad students must have international health coverage while abroad. The **minimum insurance coverage** and amounts that **you are required to have to study abroad** are the following:

- **Medical: Full coverage**
- **Emergency: Full coverage**
- **Accidental Death/Dismemberment: up to \$15,000**
- **Repatriation: up to \$25,000**
- **Evacuation: up to \$100,000**

Refer to your program description to see if health insurance is included. Also, contact your current carrier to inquire if your US health insurance policy provides coverage overseas. If your current policy does not cover you abroad, purchase a temporary policy that does. We recommend **CMI Insurance Specialists** (www.studyabroadinsurance.com). Some insurance companies provide short-term health and emergency assistance designed for study abroad participants. Carry your insurance policy card and take several insurance claim forms with you.

Safety Issues

Keep copies of all vital information at home and with you, including:

- **The identification pages of your passport**
- **Traveler's checks numbers**
- **Credit card numbers**
- **Medical prescriptions and records**
- **Any other essential documents**

A. Common Sense = Security

Although your first instinct is to trust the people you meet, you can never be too careful with your money and belongings. **Pick-pocketing**, often overlooked and dismissed as a potential threat here in the US, is an **EXTREMELY** common and popular form of crime in most countries across the globe. Complicated schemes used to distract you, such as fighting or theatrical displays, are frequently employed. "When you least expect it - expect it."

- Make sure your bags are touching some part of your body. Be aware of your surroundings since bags can be easily cut off you on crowded trains and buses—especially if you are asleep.
- When taking photographs, be sure to wrap the strap of your camera around your wrist and be careful if a stranger offers to take your photograph with your expensive camera.
- Do not take valuables on your trip which you may have difficulty replacing
- Take a major credit card or traveler's checks, NOT large amounts of cash.
- Find out which parts of town the locals consider "risky." Avoid and/or stay alert in large crowds or areas frequented by tourists.

- Carry your money and passport in a neck-purse, money belt or hidden pouch—**NOT IN YOUR BACK POCKET!**
- **Whenever possible, speak the local language.**
- Dress and behave inconspicuously in public. Try not to advertise that you are foreign by wearing your college sweatshirt, hanging out in typically American bars and pubs, wearing white socks or white tennis shoes. In many cultures, wearing a baseball-style cap is also a telltale sign you are foreign.
- Do not be free with information about other students, and do not give your or anyone else's address or phone number to strangers.
- Remember, you are not studying abroad in a bubble. If an action or behavior is considered dangerous in the United States, like walking alone at night, then it is also dangerous abroad. **USE COMMON SENSE!** If something doesn't feel safe, it probably isn't.

B. The American Embassy Overseas

Register with an American Embassy when you arrive in case an emergency arises. This is especially important in high-risk areas. **If your passport is lost or stolen**, report the loss immediately to the nearest Foreign Service post and to the local police. If you can provide the consular officer with the information contained in your passport, it will speed the issuance of a new passport.

American embassies overseas will assist you in times of national crisis or threatening circumstances. **However, embassies will not assist you if, by virtue of your own actions, you break the laws of the country in which you reside.** If you are arrested and taken to jail for a crime you have knowingly committed, the embassy is not responsible for your release. The US government has no funds for your legal fees or other related expenses.

If you are arrested, immediately notify the nearest US embassy. You have the right to contact the American Consulate. If you are unable to do this, try to have someone contact the embassy for you. The Consulate should visit you, contact family and friends and assist in the transfer of money, clothing and food.

If you experience difficulties with the local authorities, remember that American officials are limited by foreign laws, US regulations and geography as to what they can do. Should you find yourself in need of legal counsel, contact the nearest consular office and they can provide you with a list of attorneys and other legal services. Consular offices will do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law, **but they can not get you out of jail.**

Information concerning international legal assistance can be viewed at <http://travel.state.gov>.

C. Travel Advisories

If you are concerned about safety issues abroad, you may phone the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Emergency Citizen Service in Washington D.C. at (202) 647-5225 for a recorded message or at (202) 647-5226 to talk with a Department official.

Do not be alarmed when you hear travel advisories at first. Many of these advisories are nothing more than information the government has received and is obligated to make it publicly known. Listen to and read all travel advisories carefully. Then make the best judgment on whether to be alarmed. Due to the relationship between the United States and some countries, advisories may be misleading. For example, you will always find an advisory for the Middle East; however, you will seldom find an advisory for France even though there have been regular incidents involving North African terrorists for decades.

Travel Advisories can be accessed online at:

- The US State Department (<http://travel.state.gov>)
- Air Security International: Hot Spots (<http://airsecurity.com>)
- Pinkerton Global Intelligence (<http://www.pinkertons.com>)

D. Office of Overseas Citizens Services

Should your family need to contact you while you are overseas, emergency assistance is available through the Citizen's Emergency Center operated by the State Department's Bureau of Consulate Affairs. Open from 8:15 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, representatives can be reached at (202) 647-5225. For emergency communication after office hours or over the weekend, contact the Overseas Duty officer at (202) 647-1512.

The Office of Overseas Citizens Services can transmit emergency messages from your family, provide protection in the event of an arrest or detention and transmit emergency funds to destitute nationals when commercial banking facilities are not available. Provide your family with at least a tentative itinerary so the State Department has an idea where to look for you.

E. Drug Arrests

Drug arrest and convictions among Americans are on the rise. If you are caught with illegal substances overseas, **you are subject to local, not U.S. laws**, and be aware that:

- Few countries provide a jury trial
- Some countries employ the death penalty, with no questions asked
- Most countries do not accept bail
- Pre-trial detention can often last months
- Inhumane conditions may exist in the prisons
- Officials may not speak English

F. Words of Wisdom for Men and Women

Actions, which may seem perfectly normal and natural in the U.S., can be misconstrued in other countries. For example, other countries do not look lightly upon binge drinking; and in some cases, such as in Germany or Holland, the alcohol or controlled substance are stronger than in the U.S. You are ultimately responsible for your well-being.

There are also stereotypes about American women overseas, and they are not always glamorous. The common belief is that American women are “easy.”

- Be careful when talking about sex. It may equate to a come-on.
- Don't give your phone number to men. In some cultures women do not give their phone numbers to men unless they intend to date seriously.
- Do not go to clubs alone and be aware of how you dance. It may be interpreted as an “open invitation.”
- Do not respond to the catcalls you may receive—just keep walking.
- Kissing a male friend hello or goodbye may be misinterpreted.
- Be firm and assertive when you say no. Be clear and direct to be certain that your intention and words are understood.
- Be aware that things that may appear as normal to you, such as getting drunk or asking someone to walk you home, may be misconstrued as an indication of poor character.

Violence against women is a growing concern worldwide. Always be alert and use the same safety precautions as you would in the U.S. no matter where you travel. If something disconcerting or violent happens to you, go to a program director for assistance.

Unfortunately, in some countries the issue of female harassment is treated lightly.

Money

A. Banking

Although traveler's checks have been the standard means of safely carrying money overseas, the recent proliferation of ATMS allows safe and easy access to cash and/or one's personal finances for a minimal fee. Add one or both of your parent's names to your local bank account so that money may be deposited into the account while you are overseas. Using your check card for purchases will generally provide you with a better exchange rate on transactions and avoid the foreign ATM fees charged by your bank and possibly the financial institution that owns the ATM. **Notify your bank that you will be using your debit/credit card in another country prior to your departure to prevent your bank from blocking your transactions.**

When using traveler's checks, keep a list of the serial numbers and record when and where you spend each one. If they are lost or stolen, you can report which ones are missing in order to have them easily replaced. Most students find it helpful to open a bank in their foreign “home town” so they don't have to hide their money or traveler's checks.

You will need a passport to cash your traveler's checks. It would also be very wise to carry at least one credit card with you in case of emergency. If you carry two, put them in two different places.

Some large banks and American Express provide foreign currency traveler's checks. Due to the differences in exchange rates, you may want to watch the market for a good rate of exchange before buying your traveler's checks. Mellon Bank, located in Pittsburgh provides this service for British Pounds, Canadian Dollars, Swiss Francs, Euros and Japanese Yen. Contact a bank representative at (412) 234-5000. Mutual of Omaha, located in the Pittsburgh Airport, provides a similar service.

B. Wiring Money

Simply put, it's usually very fast and very expensive. You could receive money from home within several hours to several days, but most banks worldwide will charge you to receive the money. In addition, most banks charge to send money as well as to convert the money from U.S. dollars into the local currency. Charges at either end usually run between \$15—\$30 depending on the amount of money to be sent. For more information about wiring money, contact Western Union at (800) 235-6000 or your local bank.

Travel Issues

Driving a vehicle in another country is never recommended. The number one cause of injury and death to Americans abroad is vehicle accidents—whether by automobile, motorcycle or bike. Different driving laws and road conditions cause confusion that can lead to accidents. Not only should you avoid driving a vehicle, you should also be cautious about safety while riding in a bus, train or taxi. Don't travel in empty train cars and try to find a travel partner. Check arrival and departure times before traveling and reconfirm all trips. Avoid scheduling travel when you will arrive at your destination late at night. Even if there is a meter in a cab, agree to an amount or estimation before traveling. **It is NEVER recommended to hitchhike.**

A. International Driving Permit

If you expect to be driving while overseas, it is recommended that you have an International Driving Permit. While some countries recognize a US Driver's License, others may have restriction such as age requirements or proof of insurance. Check with the nearest embassy or consulate to find out the specifics. To obtain an International Driving Permit, contact any AAA office.

B. International Youth Hostels

Staying in youth hostels is one of the most interesting and inexpensive ways to travel overseas. Hostels can range anywhere from a large dormitory-style setup to something reminiscent of a bed-and-breakfast. The difference between a hostel and a hotel is that hostels generally have fewer amenities in the room, such as no towels, soap or shampoo. In most cases there will not be a bathroom, telephone or television in the room either.

Hostels are a great way to meet travelers and students from other countries and to gather travel information. Some hostels may require a membership to an international hosteling organization for you to stay there. You can obtain a membership through CIEE (check the Student Travels Catalogue.) A one-year membership costs \$25. Non-members are subject to higher fees.

C. Alternatives to Hostels

In different countries inexpensive accommodations have various names including:

Great Britain: Bed and Breakfast

Scandinavia: Hus Rom

Germany: Zimmer

France: Chambre d'Hote

Italy: Camere Affitta

Yugoslavia: Sobe

Greece: Dhomatia

Spain: Casas Particulares

Portugal: Cuartos

Eastern Europe: Simmer or Rooms

Japan: Ryokan

D. Rail Passes

If you are planning to travel throughout Europe, you may want to buy a Eurailpass which is good for unlimited travel throughout 17 countries. There are also "Britrail" and "Oz" passes for the UK and Australia. They can only be purchased at a discount price from STA prior to your departure. For more information, visit www.counciltravel.com.

E. Travel Advice

- Purchase a reliable guidebook that lists restaurants, hotels/hostels, area descriptions, train/bus schedules, consulate information, travel advice etc.
- Don't plan trips within or near a war zone.
- Do not agree to watch the belongings of a person whom you do not know.
- Do not borrow suitcases and ensure that nothing is inserted into yours.
- Eat where the locals eat, which is often at home.
- Stay away from "western" hostels and restaurants because they are typically expensive.
- Courier Travel is often less expensive than traditional airline companies, although travel dates are very restricted. Be sure to check out the agency prior to contacting them.

F. Home-stay Tips

- Be natural and always keep an open mind.
- Spend time with your host family from the start—photographs are a great icebreaker and lead to great conversations.
- Bring a gift for your host family upon arrival.
- Ask questions and take an interest in your host city/country.
- Try to be as flexible as possible and your anxiety will decrease. Always remember that your host family is in the same position as you are.
- Remember that you are a guest in your host's home and treat them with respect.
- Don't be bothered by first reactions or tone of voice. Inflections in certain languages could seem stern or disapproving.

- Remember that other cultures have different facial and body expressions which may seem rude by American standards, but may be perfectly normal in their own culture.
- Talk openly with your host family if there is a problem.

At first living with a host family may be frustrating and difficult. Once your host family knows you're interested to really get to know them and the host country, they will help a lot. **Don't be afraid to speak another language.** It's very important to accept corrections and not care that you make mistakes. Try to speak with the family as often as possible.

Dormitory vs. Home-stay Family

| Dormitory | Home-stay Family |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Close to campus | Commute to campus |
| Contact with a variety of different students from many different cities and countries. | Cultural immersion — provides an in-depth look of family life in your host country, and if they speak a different language, an excellent opportunity to increase your language skills. |
| More opportunity to communicate with friends and participate in group activities, but on the other hand, can be noisy and hard to concentrate on studying. | Less time for friends and social time due to commuting and family obligations. You may even have a curfew. However, you will have fewer distractions. |
| Open diet — but you have to find it and cook it! | Your diet will be the same as your host family. |
| On your own for sightseeing — you choose where you go, who you go with and how long you are there. | Your host family may recommend places to go see and could even offer to take you sightseeing. |
| You will do everything. | You might be assigned chores. |

Research Your New Home

One of the most common regrets students have about their study abroad experience is not preparing themselves in advance for what lies ahead. Learning about your host country will help you adjust to your new environment and will aid your intercultural understanding. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How many prominent people in the host country can you name (i.e., politicians, athletes, religious leaders or artists?)
- Do you know the national anthem and the country flag?
- Are other languages spoken besides the dominant language?

- What is the predominant religion?
- What are the most important holidays? How are they observed?
- What is the attitude toward alcohol consumption?
- Is the price asked for merchandise fixed or are customers expected to bargain? How is bargaining conducted?
- How do people organize their daily activities? Is there a daytime rest period? What is the customary time for friends to visit?
- What is the normal meal schedule? What foods are most popular?
- What are the cultural taboos?
- What is the usual dress for women and men? Do teenagers wear jeans?
- On what occasions would you present (or accept) gifts from people in the country?
- How do people greet one another? Do they shake hands, embrace or kiss? How do they depart one another?
- What are the favorite leisure and recreational activities? What sports are popular?
- How will your financial position and living conditions compare with those of the majority of people living in this country?
- What kinds of local transportation are available?
- Is military training compulsory?
- What is the historical relationship between the country and the USA?
- Are there many Americans living in the country?
- What kinds of health services are available? Where are they? Does everyone have equal access to health care?
- Where can medicines be purchased? Do you always need a prescription?
- What are the major industries? What is the minimum wage? Is there one?
- What groups of people are discriminated against? Why?
- How is the USA viewed for its political history and current practice?
- What common images of Americans does the host culture maintain?

There are many methods to finding the answers to these questions. Check your local library for books and periodicals about your host country, as well as the host country's embassy. Also, the Office of International Programs may be able to put you in touch with past participants who are willing to answer questions about their experiences.

Web sites that may be useful:

- The International Education Site (www.intstudy.com)
- CIA Factbook (www.cia.gov/publications/factbook/index.html)
- Travel Document Systems (www.traveldocs.com)
- U.S. State Department (<http://travel.state.gov>)

Packing

Your first urge is to pack everything you own aside from the kitchen sink. Although this seems logical since you are going away to college for the semester, it is not feasible. Most airlines prohibit you from checking in more than two bags. Also airlines have weight limits. American airlines charge extra for baggage over 40-50 lbs; European airlines charge extra for baggage over 70 lbs. In some cases, if you pack too much, the airlines will not accept your baggage because of liability risks to their workers. **The moral of the story is to PACK LIGHT.**

US students tend to wear something different every day of the week. You will find that in other countries, no one cares if you wear the same thing two or three days in a row. **Be aware of how people treat you according to your dress and then dress according to how you want to be treated.** A good supply of socks and underwear are the main things you will need. Bring necessities with you, but purchase the rest in your host country. Bring photographs or postcards from home to show your new friends. Take something familiar from home such as a pillowcase or poster.

Keep a travel journal even if it is your first time. Students, who haven't, report that they forgot events, people and places. Journals can also be used as a tool to help you through difficult times while overseas and when you return home. Don't just write about chronological events, keep updated with themes. **Keep in mind that re-entry shock is as real as the culture shock you experience overseas.**

Journals can easily be kept on the computer, compiling a photo-journal or e-mailing your experiences to friends and family. Your journal is an expression of you so simply choose a style and an approach that is most comfortable.

A. What Should I Pack?

- **A few semi-dressy outfits:** Europeans tend to "dress up" compared to Americans. Bring jeans, but complement them with nicer tops.
- **Personal hygiene items:** Unless there is a specific brand you cannot live without, overseas products are similar to American brands. You may even discover products you like better.
- **Trail size box of detergent**
- **Film:** Film is often cheaper in the U.S. Ask for your camera/film to be hand-checked when going through security to avoid potential damage to the film.
- **Sweatpants:** Sweatpants are extremely expensive and difficult to find overseas. If you do not think you can survive a semester without them, be sure to bring a pair.
- **American Souvenirs:** You never know who you may encounter overseas. Bring a couple little gifts that you can give your friends or important people you meet. For example, maple syrup.

B. What Shouldn't I Pack?

- **Keys**
 - **Valuables:** Anything that has or implies high financial value should be left at home. These items can easily be lost, stolen or damaged. iPods are especially popular for pick-pockets.
 - **Books and school supplies:** Aside from your travel guide, books consume a large amount of space and are extremely heavy. Buy them overseas.
 - **Cell Phone:** Other countries have different cellular systems than the U.S. Use phone cards that you buy overseas.
-

Communicating With Home

A. Telephone

Phone Cards: Locally-purchased phone cards are usually the most reasonably priced and convenient ways to make phone calls overseas. They are available at the local post office. Students, who have purchased the International Student Identification Card (ISIC,) can utilize the ISICConnect service. This service allows students world-wide to make inexpensive phone calls, send and receive E-mails and store digital copies of important documents online.

Cell Phones: Some students find that having a cell phone, especially on programs that travel throughout Europe, Asia and Latin America, is very helpful. For more information on plans and fees, visit www.piccellwireless.com. You must place your order at least two weeks prior to your departure.

Skype: A popular form of communication among Europeans is Skype, a phone service through your computer. Calls to other Skype members are free or students can purchase inexpensive plans to call friends and relatives. You will need a headset. For more information, visit www.skype.com.

B. Letters

Be aware that international postage can be expensive and it may take several weeks for your letter to arrive.

C. Electronic Mail

E-mail is probably the easiest and least expensive way to communicate with your friends and family. Check with your host institution regarding e-mail access. Because MIX may be less effective abroad, you may want to establish a free e-mail account with other free Web-based e-mail providers.

Students can also access the Internet at local Internet cafes. Some restaurants, such as Dunkin' Doughnuts, offer Internet services to paying customers. To locate cybercafés, visit <http://cybercaptive.com> or <http://netcafes.com>.

CROSS - CULTURAL ISSUES

You must be the change you wish to see in the world. — GHANDI

Intercultural Communication

Communication is always a challenge when two cultures meet. Both language and mannerisms contribute to the complexities of intercultural communication; in many instances, language cannot be directly translated word for word. Therefore, it is essential to understand much more than just the grammatical structure of a host country's language. Cultural values must also be taken into account.

Upon your arrival in the host country, try to recognize the style of communication and the cultural meaning behind it. This will help you overcome some culture shock.

- **Masculine/Feminine Cultures:** Recognize whether a culture has a masculine or feminine approach toward communication. Masculine cultures (i.e., the United States) value achievement, assertiveness and material wealth. Feminine cultures (i.e., Sweden) value relationships and overall quality of life.
- **Tolerance of Uncertainty vs. Avoidance of Uncertainty:** There are some cultures in which people need certainty. These cultures will enforce strict rules for behavior and develop more elaborate codes of conduct, either formal or informal, during communication.
- **Concentrated vs. Decentralized Power:** Some cultures value equality and distribution of power more than other cultures. This is noticeable in the roles of communication that people play with each other.
- **Individual vs. Group Achievement:** Some cultures put more emphasis on individualism (e.g. the United States) while others place more emphasis on the good of the group (i.e., Japan.)

A. Types of Education

Education is not delivered in a universal way. According to L.R. Kohls, there are two types of education: deductive and inductive. **Deductive education** occurs when the instructor has all the knowledge and provides a lecture for the class. Students do not interrupt or ask questions that challenge the instructor. **Inductive education**, however, occurs when the teacher initiates a discussion or encourages group activity. In this setting, the student is encouraged to actively think and treat education as a unique 'personal experience,' rather than one lectured by a professor.

Inductive education is found in Anglo-Saxon or northern European cultures such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the United States. **The ratio of educational styles in the world versus the US is 180 to 8.** Other countries focus on deductive education which may challenge your intercultural communication skills. --L.R. Kohls, *Carrying American-Designed Training Overseas*

B. Global Discoveries: Ways to Improve Your Intercultural Communication

- **Seek information:** Prejudice stems from ignorance.
- **Lose Assumptions:** Do not rely on the assumptions of your own cultural heritage. Be aware of the richness of other cultures.
- **Ask questions!** Be prepared to share information about yourself, and be sensitive in the way you ask questions. Open communication helps to reduce uncertainty.
- **Develop Flexibility.** Not everything always goes as planned.
- **Tolerate Ambiguity.** Communicating with someone from another culture produces uncertainty, which can be uncomfortable. Learn to tolerate the discomfort because communication gets easier over time.
- **Avoid Negative Judgments.** Resist thinking that your culture has all the answers. It has its strengths and weaknesses just like any other culture.

Cultural Shock and Adjustment

Life is a progress, and not a station.
--RALPH WALDO EMERSON

A. Culture Shock

“Culture shock” is used to describe the more pronounced reactions and psychological disorientation most people experience while living in a culture different from their own for an extended period of time. Culture shock is one of the biggest personal challenges you will encounter overseas. It can cause intense discomfort, often accompanied by hyper-irritability, bitterness, resentment, homesickness and depression. In some cases distinct physical symptoms of psychosomatic illness occur.

SYMPTOMS OF CULTURE SHOCK

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Homesickness | Compulsive Eating |
| Withdrawal | Unexplainable Crying |
| Boredom | Exaggerated Cleanliness |
| Irritability | Family Tension/Conflict |
| Marital Stress | Chauvinistic Behavior |
| Stereotyping | Hostility Toward Locals |
| Excessive Sleep | Ineffective Academic Work |
| Physical Ailments (Psychosomatic Illnesses) | |

SOME COMMON CAUSES:

- The ambiguity of a particular situation or when the actual situation does not match preconceived notions.
- The results of your experience are not seen because of daily challenges. It may take 6—12 months before you understand the impact of your overseas experience.
- Academic expectations are thwarted because of a different educational system.
- Your cultural methods are inappropriate for “getting things done” in the new culture.

Although often grouped together, culture shock is different from frustration. Frustration is always traceable to a specific cause and alleviates when the situation is remedied. Culture shock is longer lived and derived from the experience of encountering ways of life that are different from your culture and familiar cultural routines. Different practices can be perceived as a threat to your basic, unconscious belief in your customs, assumptions and values. As a result, culture shock slowly develops over time from a series of events that are difficult to identify.

Often students feel ambivalent when they have only lived in another culture for a short period of time. For example, Americans abroad in Brazil might be asked to dinner or social events that never materialize. We experience the cultural difference of Brazilian social plans, which are never set in stone, compared to the American concept of when you make plans, keep them.

Sometimes culture shock results when your values are questioned. Tara spent a semester overseas in Italy. While riding on the trains, she was surprised that they do not separate the smoking from non-smoking sections. Italian culture does not have the same view of space and clean air. Tara realized that one culture may perceive something as a freedom, whereas others perceive it as a rule.

Because culture shock progresses slowly, your first reaction is to assume the way of life is quaint. However, when it becomes clear that the differences are not simply quaint, but a way of life, an effort is frequently made to dismiss them by pointing out the cultural similarities. Eventually, the focus shifts to the differences themselves, sometimes to such an extent that they may seem overwhelming. There may be times when small things are blown out of proportion. ***Do not to let the host culture become the scapegoat for the natural difficulties inherent with the study abroad experience.***

The symptoms of culture shock will not always be present in everyone. Many people experience cultural adjustments with ease. However, culture shock is a serious personal reaction to a new country. If culture shock happens to you, it is important to know adjustment is inevitable and emotional reactions are not easily subject to rational management.

B. Stages of Culture Shock

There are four commonly held stages of personal adjustment people undergo overseas:

1. **Initial Euphoria:** People begin new adventures with expectations. Upon arrival you will want to absorb every ounce of the host culture, but don't be surprised if you feel disappointed. Preconceived notions are often hard for the host country to meet. Initial euphoria usually lasts 1-2 weeks, sometimes even a month.
2. **Irritation and Hostility:** This stage occurs when the differences of the host culture become too burdensome for your cultural norms. You may become irritable toward small and insignificant things, such as the times lunch and dinner are served. Some people actually rebel by refusing to "do things the way locals do things."

3. **Gradual Adjustment:** Culture shock begins to subside once you pass through the stages of euphoria and irritation. The host culture will seem more familiar and you will understand some of the subtle cultural nuances. Although you may not appreciate all aspects of the host culture, you are at least able to feel less isolated.
4. **Adaptation and Biculturalism:** Culture shock is no longer a problem when you are able to fully function in two cultures with confidence.

There is no determined length of time that culture shock lasts. The extent to which culture shock affects an individual is personal and relative to the duration of stay in the host country.

C. Coping with Culture Shock

How to minimize the impact of adjustment to your new host culture:

1. Get to know the host culture
2. Look for logical reasons behind all things that seem “foreign” to your rationale
3. Resist being arrogant and close-minded
4. Make friends in the host culture who can sympathize or empathize
5. Communicate with family and friends from home when you feel homesick
6. Exercise—it relieves tension and releases endorphins
7. Maintain a positive attitude about your experience. Remember this is supposed to be one of the best times of your life!

D. Taboos

When overseas it is essential that you are aware of what are appropriate and inappropriate actions within the host culture. It is easy to forget that some American customs may be perceived as rude or vulgar.

- Americans tend to like larger amounts of personal space than residents in France. Unconsciously you may be perceived as being “socially uncomfortable” because you keep a longer distance from the person with whom you converse.
- In Africa pointing the index and third fingers is considered as giving the “evil eye” to another person.
- In Malaysia it is considered rude to look directly into the person’s eyes during a conversation. Although Americans tend to think of eye contact as a way of showing attention during a conversation, Malaysians perceive it as a form of domination and control.
- Americans tend to cross legs during a conversation and it is not uncommon for Americans to touch their shoes. In Lebanon, however, people view this as a sign of poor hygiene.

Realistically, it is impossible to illustrate every single cultural taboo found on the planet. However, the point is to **research your host culture prior to your departure**. Contact some previous study abroad participants around WVU or country natives now living in the U.S. for advice.

E. Responses to Cultural Adjustment

Fight:

When traveling overseas people often believe their way of life is the right way. They want to show natives of the host country a quicker and more efficient way to live. Be conscious of your responses and behaviors. Try not to unknowingly engage in “fight” responses.

Flight:

You may notice U.S. students hanging out together a lot while studying abroad. These students are engaged in the flight response which is an avoidance of the host culture and things that make them feel uncomfortable.

Adaptation:

As you adjust to the culture of your host country, you may find yourself compromising. There is nothing wrong with that. You must decide what actions are right for you. You may realize that for your acceptance into your new community, you may do things that you would not do at home.

For example: “In my host family the expectation was that the father was always served by a female member of the family during meals. On one occasion, all of the women, except for me, were out and I was to take care of dinner. I found it very difficult to be expected to wait on someone, particularly in a family setting. However, I served my host father out of respect for him. I could have made other decisions about this situation and held to my personal values, but that might have created an uncomfortable situation.”

F. Homesickness/Coping

Being homesick is completely normal. Dealing with it is important, however, so that it doesn't hinder your valuable time in your new home. Here are some tips:

- **Take a little bit of home:** Bring photographs of family and friends. Sometimes bringing a pillowcase helps if you are traveling to various countries.
- **Stay in touch:** E-mail family and friends to stay updated.
- **Remember that it is worth it:** Don't forget that you are in the middle of a wonderful opportunity. There is no excuse for being bored—get out and explore your new surroundings. There are people to meet and places to see.

Customs Information

A. Pre-Departure

Become familiar with the US CUSTOMS REGULATIONS. If you plan to take foreign-made personal articles overseas, consider getting a certificate of registration from the customs office nearest to you or at any port of exit from the United States. This certificate will expedite free entry of those items when you return by offering proof of purchase in America.

B. Entering a Foreign Country

Custom declaration forms are distributed on ships and planes and should be prepared in advance of your arrival for presentation to the immigration custom inspectors. Whether you have anything to declare, you have to fill out at least the identification section of the form.

Upon entering the foreign country, you must show your passport, turn in your customs declaration form and pass through the baggage check. Customs regulations and procedures vary from country to country. If you are traveling with any unusual items or large quantities of goods, check with the appropriate embassy prior to departure to ensure that such articles are not prohibited.

C. Sending Items Home

Any single item worth more than \$25 is subject to customs tax. Mark inexpensive gifts as "UNSOLICITED GIFT: VALUE UNDER \$25" and no duty will need to be paid by the recipient. When sending clothing home, you should declare them as "USED CLOTHING of an American abroad, which has no commercial value. This does not include items that were purchased abroad and then worn. You can also ship home personal goods of US origin duty free if you mark them as "AMERICAN GOODS RETURNED."

Do not misrepresent what is contained in the packages. US Customs opens packages regularly and randomly. False declaration is a serious matter.

D. U.S. Customs Regulations

- Everyone must complete at least the identification portion of the customs form.
- Duty regulations allow you to bring \$400 worth of goods duty free. You pay a flat rate on the next \$1000 worth. If you fail to declare or understate the value, penalties can be severe.
- The goods that you bring in duty-free must be for your personal or household use and cannot include more than 100 cigars, 200 cigarettes and one liter of alcohol. You must be at least 21 years old to bring alcohol into the United States.
- If you do not exceed the duty-free limitation, you need only declare the total value of the goods accompanying you. If you surpass the limitations of \$1400 then you must fill out a written declaration form listing everything acquired abroad that you are bring home and price paid.

Remember that "duty free" only means that you did not pay local taxes in the country of purchase. Also remember to watch the prices in the duty-free shops.

Reverse Culture Shock

Returning to the United States is just as challenging as the initial move overseas. You may develop feelings of anxiety because you have to re-settle with your friends and family. This is known as reverse culture shock. **The general rule of thumb: Students who are ready to return home from their host country at the end of their experience have an easier time than students who are not ready to leave.**

Often feelings of disappointment emerge when family and friends are not interested in your overseas experience. They are unable to relate to and understand your experiences abroad. *Life in the United States has gone on without you and people there have changed too.* Although each individual has a different experience readjusting, reverse culture shock is a natural process of study abroad. You've broadened your horizons. Give the "new" you time to adjust to your old environment.

Here are some suggestions to alleviate feelings of disorientation, alienation, unhappiness, not-belonging and homesickness of your host country.

- Contact your WVU study abroad advisor, who is empathetic to your feelings, and help you meet other students in similar situations.
- Talk to your family and friends about your feelings and concerns and say *why you feel that way*. This will not only help them relate to your feelings, but help them realize how real of a concern those feelings are.
- Get involved with international student organizations and/or clubs.
- Find ways of communicating your experiences with people who are interested.

Many returning study abroad students feel bored when they return home. They are used to having the expectation of something new and exciting on the horizon. The activities that may have interested before your experience will not necessarily be the same. Try to find different things that interest you around campus or explore the U.S.

Remember that there is no one solution for readjusting to your home environment. Find a technique that suits your personality and needs. A defining chapter in your life has just closed. Nevertheless, the impact of this chapter will influence many other future chapters of your life that have yet to be written.

Remaining a Citizen of the World

There are a number of things that you can do to help the transition of your experience:

- **Join a Student Organization** that deals with international issues, such as the International Student Organization or Women across Cultures.
- **Become an Intern in the Office of International Programs:** Interns advise students on study abroad opportunities and complete special projects such as helping with promotional events and giving classroom presentations.
- **Expand your academic interests** to encompass your experiences (i.e., a minor in Art History) or take classes in your area of interest.
- **Communicate with others** by sharing similar experiences in order to verbalize thoughts, feelings, reactions and difficulties encountered at home.
- **Rework your resume** to highlight your study abroad. Be specific and explain some of your experiences.
- **Start researching your next adventure abroad:** study, work, intern or volunteer overseas again.
- **Remember, you are a role model to students** who have not been out of the country. Share your experiences and inspire them to follow your example.
- **Take advantage of the Career Services Center.** Lots of helpful information is available regarding international positions.