



Study Abroad Handbook

Preparing for your International Experience



Rinker Center for International Programs
Ball State University

Table of Contents

Introduction and Important Contacts	2
Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning	
Things to do Before Leaving the U.S.	3
Passport Information	5
Visa Information	6
Travel Arrangements	6
Health Information	7
Financial Information	8
Legal Information	9
Alcohol, Drugs, and Crime	10
Communications	11
Packing	12
Packing Checklist	14
Section 2: Arrival in Host Country	
Overcoming Jet Lag	15
Housing	15
Safety Abroad	17
Being an American Abroad	18
Culture Shock	19
Diversity Abroad	20
Academic Differences	21
Section 3: Re-entry	
Reverse Culture Shock	23
Build on Your Experience	24
Section 4: Resources	25

Introduction

Congratulations on your acceptance to a study abroad program! The experience that you are about to have will likely be one of the most exciting and rewarding periods of your life!

This handbook is meant to help you navigate through the study abroad process. Although it has been compiled from many different resources in order to present you with a comprehensive guide, it is not a substitute for your individual research. Studying abroad is an investment in your future, and as such, it requires time and commitment.

You will get the most out of your time abroad by preparing as much as possible beforehand by utilizing resources such as books, websites, past study abroad participants, international students, and your advisor. Such resources will prepare you for the challenges and opportunities that you will encounter abroad. Although studying abroad presents you with unparalleled and unique opportunities, it is up to you to take advantage of them. Remaining flexible, keeping a positive attitude, and taking initiative will ensure that you will gain the most that you can from your experience.

Important Contacts

Rinker Center for International Programs

L.A. Pittenger Student Center, 102

Phone: 765-285-5422

Fax: 765-285-3710

Email: studyabroad@bsu.edu

- John Jensen
Director of Study Abroad
Email: jwjensen@bsu.edu
- Kelly Kirkwood
Assistant Director of Study Abroad
Email: kjkirkwood@bsu.edu

BSU Campus Police (24/7)

Phone: 765-285-1832

Emergency Phone: 765-285-1111

For Answers about Financial Aid

Scholarships and Financial Aid

Lucina Hall, room 245

Phone: 765-285-4247

For Answers to Billing Questions

Bursar and Loan Administration

Lucina Hall, room B31

Phone: 765-285-1643

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

Things to do Before Leaving the U.S.

- ❑ **Get your passport:** Apply immediately if you do not already have a passport or if it is not valid for at least six months beyond your planned return to the U.S. See page 5 of this handbook for details.
- ❑ **Get your visa:** Entry requirements vary by country.
- ❑ **Complete your online pre-departure orientation:** The online module is in the Study Abroad portal.
- ❑ **Complete and return paperwork:** Access the Study Abroad Portal to complete all required documentation. Contact the Rinker Center if you have any questions about this.
- ❑ **Meet with academic departments to receive approval for courses taken abroad:** This is to be done on the Request for Study Abroad Credit (RSAC) form included in your online application documentation.
- ❑ **Visit Financial Aid:** Students intending to use financial aid toward the cost of the study abroad program need to schedule an appointment with the Financial Aid Office. You must take a budget of projected costs to your meeting so that they can assess how much you need.
- ❑ **Make flight arrangements:** Do not make flight arrangements until after you have been accepted to your program and have verified your required arrival date.
- ❑ **Get immunizations, prescriptions, and other health issues taken care of as soon as possible.** Consult BSU Health Center, your personal physician and/or the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website for more information.
- ❑ **Make financial and legal arrangements:** Make sure that you have access to money while abroad and a way to coordinate financial matters at home.
- ❑ **Register for your study abroad classes here at BSU:** See the Rinker Center with any questions about this process.

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

- ❑ **Plan ahead for registration, housing, and other matters for your return to Ball State.** See the Rinker Center for any questions about this process.
- ❑ **Arrange for phone calls and other communications overseas.**
- ❑ **Pack.**
- ❑ **Research and prepare for what to expect in your host country:** It is very important to learn as much as you can about the host culture as well as familiarize yourself with culture shock and how to manage those emotions.



Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

Passport Information

A valid U.S. passport is required to enter and leave foreign countries. In recent years there has been an unprecedented demand for passports; therefore, **you should apply for a passport immediately**. Passports are valid for 10 years. If you already have a passport, make sure it is valid for at least six months beyond your planned return to the U.S.

In order to obtain a new passport, print and complete the application form found at the U.S. Department of State website. Take the completed application along with a notarized birth certificate (with raised seal) and a copy of your driver's license to the main post office in any town. The main post office in Muncie is at 501 W. Memorial Drive.

You will also need to bring two identical 2x2 inch passport photos with you to the post office. These can be taken at the Rinker Center (\$10 for 2 or \$15 for 4), or may be purchased at Walgreen's, Meijer, or the post office. You may need to attach a photo with your visa application or for other ID cards, so you may want to purchase and keep extras with you.

“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.”

– St. Augustine

You will need to write two checks: one to the U.S. State Department and one to the U.S. Postal Service. These materials will be packaged by the post office and sent to the appropriate offices. You should receive your passport in 6-12 weeks. Your birth certificate will be returned with your passport.

For additional information about passport fees, locations, and other policies, visit http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

Visa Information

A visa is an official document (endorsement or stamp) issued by the government of the host country that allows the bearer to visit that country. Visa regulations vary by country and processing may take a few weeks to a few months to issue. You should check with the embassy of your host country as soon as possible to confirm visa application requirements.

Visit the U.S. Department of State website for information about your host country embassy or consulate and for foreign entry requirements:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1229.html

Begin collecting required documents, even if you do not yet have your passport, and submit your visa application as soon as you have all of the required materials. If you plan to travel to other countries before, during, or after your study abroad experience, you will need to check each country's visa requirements before departure as well.

Working While Abroad

All countries have strict regulations governing the ability of foreigners to work in their country. Often, foreign students are not allowed to work at all. Even in countries that do allow foreign students to work part-time, you may find that jobs are scarce, that it is difficult to combine work and studies, or that your host institution may prohibit you from working, even if it is legal for you to do so. Working without legal permission is considered grounds for deportation in many countries.

Travel Arrangements

We recommend buying a round-trip ticket with a set return date and flying into the airport closest to your final destination. Open-ended tickets are generally not acceptable to Immigration in the host country.

Consider carefully before flying into an airport that is not the closest to your final destination simply because it is cheaper. Remember that you will have all of your luggage and will likely be tired and jet lagged. We recommend you do not book a flight through Orbitz, Travelocity, Expedia, or similar third party booking website. This is because if there are any changes to your flight you may experience difficulty with rebooking. Although you should use these websites to compare prices, you should book your flight directly from the airline or a travel agent.

“Travel is glamorous only in retrospect.”

– Paul Theroux

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

When booking flights, remember to leave enough time between connecting flights. This will help to make you feel more comfortable and relaxed and can serve as a buffer if your first flight is delayed. Try not to avoid scheduling a flight that arrives late at night if you are alone and in an unfamiliar city.

We strongly recommend that you register with the U.S. Embassy in the countries that you will be traveling. You can do so via the Department of State S.T.E.P. program. Information about S.T.E.P. is in your online application in the study abroad portal. You should also leave a copy of your itinerary and travel plans with your family.

Health Information

Before you leave, assess your own health and any requirements for your host country. You may need to have a physical exam due to visa requirements. Other countries may require or recommend vaccinations. See the Center for Disease Control for more information on your host country (www.cdc.gov).

If you take prescription medication or wear contact lenses, make sure that you have a supply to last the duration of your stay and that your medication is not restricted by your host country. Obtain signed and dated statements from your doctor indicating the generic and brand name of the medication, any major health problems, and dosage. This will be vital in case of an emergency. Pack your prescriptions and medications in their original packages in your carry-on luggage. It is also helpful to have notes from your physician explaining the condition that requires the medication, as customs officials may ask to see it. If you have asthma, allergies, diabetes, or any other condition that may require emergency care, you should carry a card, tag, or bracelet that identifies your medical condition.



All students will be enrolled in health insurance and evacuation coverage while abroad. Make sure that you fully understand how your insurance works and where you can receive medical care. Students will typically need to pay for the cost of care up front and be reimbursed later. Carry your insurance card with you at all times.

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

Mental health is also a concern while studying abroad. The stress of adjusting to a new culture may exacerbate any pre-existing conditions. Be sure to read up on culture shock and what to expect so this effect will be minimized. You may also want to visit your doctor prior to departure to sign a release for medical records in order to take a copy of your records with you. This will be helpful if you need to meet with a doctor or counselor overseas.

We encourage students to be extra cautious about their sexual activity while abroad. HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are prevalent everywhere in the world. In some countries the availability of condoms is restricted. If you plan to be sexually active, we recommend you pack your own.

Financial Information

You should have several ways to access money abroad, including credit cards, debit cards, and U.S. and local currency. It is also wise to set a budget and make sure that you are paying attention to it!

You should have cash with you at all times in case of emergency and for smaller stores or taxis that only accept cash. However, you should avoid carrying large sums of money, which could be lost or stolen. It may be useful to obtain some of your host country's currency before departure. Many banks and airports will do this for you for a fee.

Debit/ATM cards are a common way for students to obtain money from their checking account while abroad, but you should never rely on it alone. You will be charged a fee and the exchange rate when taking money out of an ATM. Make sure to contact your bank ahead of time to let them know when you will be abroad and to make sure that your card and PIN number will work overseas.

Credit cards are invaluable in case of emergency, and they are a good way to access money while abroad. Purchases on a credit card are charged at that day's current exchange rate, and most credit card companies will charge a small fee for this conversion. Make sure that you contact your credit card company to let them know the dates that you will be traveling and where. If they see a foreign charge on a card that usually has U.S. charges, it may seem like suspicious activity and cause them to cancel your card. This also applies for debit cards. You should also establish a PIN for your credit card. Although uncommonly used in the U.S., a PIN for your credit card will allow you to make cash advances for a fee, which is very helpful in a true

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

emergency. Also, remember that you will need to continue making payments on your credit card online or arrange for someone at home to do so on your behalf.

Make sure to leave photocopies of your credit and debit cards in a safe place in case they are lost or stolen. You will need the account numbers and phone number to report the stolen card.

Legal Information

Power of Attorney

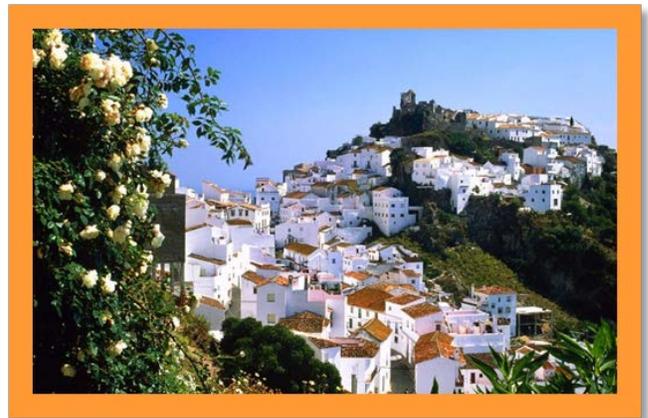
A power of attorney is an official designation that a parent or trusted individual can take care of legal and financial matters while you are away. By giving them power of attorney you allow them to sign documents, take care of your banking, and make legal decisions on your behalf. Ball State University Student Legal Services can help prepare the documents for you at no charge. You need to select a trusted person over 18 years of age and determine how much access or power that person will have (handling bank/bursar accounts, filing tax papers, etc.). Leave a notarized copy of the power of attorney with the person whom you designated. Notaries can be found on campus in the Dean's office on the second floor of the Library or in the Office of the Registrar in Lucina Hall.

Student Legal Services

Student Center L-17

Muncie, IN 47306

Phone: 765-285-1888



Documents

As a precaution, you should make copies of all important documents prior to your departure. Make copies of each document so you can leave one set at home and take one set with you. When traveling, do not keep your copies with your actual documents. Try to leave the copies in a safe central location once you arrive at your host country. Consider scanning the documents and emailing them to yourself as well. You should make copies of:

- Passport (the page with your picture and passport number)

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

- Visa page from your passport
- Driver's License and other ID Cards
- Debit/ATM and Credit Cards (front and back)
- Any important documents from your host institution, such as your admission letter
- Power of attorney notarized letter
- Health Insurance Card
- Prescriptions
- Airline ticket/confirmation and itinerary

Alcohol, Drugs, and Crime

While studying abroad you will most likely be in a location where you are of legal drinking age and where alcohol may be a part of the everyday culture. You are encouraged to use good judgment if you choose to consume alcoholic beverages abroad. Be aware of and abide by the customs and laws of the host country, and remember that you are representing Ball State University and the U.S. as a whole.

Drugs are illegal in most countries around the world, and drug laws are often stricter in other countries, despite what you may have heard. In some countries, possession of even a relatively small amount of illegal drugs can be grounds for mandatory jail sentence or even the death penalty. Once you have ventured beyond U.S. borders you are no longer protected by U.S. laws and constitutional rights.

It is your responsibility to understand the laws of your host country before you go. "I didn't know it was illegal" is not an acceptable defense. If you ever get into legal trouble abroad, you should immediately contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Communications

Parents often worry when you are in a foreign country and they do not know if you are okay. Let them know you will contact them when you arrive and periodically

Accept your host country for what it is. You will enjoy it more when you stop comparing it to other places. Get to know the people—they are what make the city great.

-Rosalyn, past study abroad participant in Spain

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

while you are abroad. Talk with them before you leave about their expectations for frequency and time of communications. **Keep in mind that it may not be feasible for you to call home right away when you arrive in your host country.** Making sure that your parents are aware of this can prevent them from becoming overly worried. Also, try to resist the urge to communicate *too* frequently with family and friends, as it may make you homesick and delay your progress in immersing yourself in the host culture and making friends.

Telephone costs can be very expensive in your host country, both locally and long-distance. Phone cards are a good option to use to communicate with friends and family at home and in your host country. Do not buy a U.S. phone card as your access number will be long distance in your host country. Local phone cards are typically cheaper than a U.S. card. Pay phones in your host country may take cards instead of coins. These cards can be purchased in local shops and post offices.

If you plan to take your cell phone abroad, always call your U.S. provider and ask about their options. They may be able to provide international service on your phone, although the costs may be considerably higher. If your phone is compatible, you can use it in Wi-Fi areas and/or you may need to have it “unlocked” by your provider so that you can use other SIM cards. If the costs are too high, or your phone is incompatible with international systems, you may choose to rent or buy a phone in your host country.

Mail can be sent to and from your host country, although it can take up to 2-6 weeks for delivery. Be sure to mark “Air Mail” on your mail if you are sending it overseas. Otherwise, it will be sent by surface mail and can take several months. Make sure to leave the address of where you will be staying with your family and friends so that they can send you mail if necessary.

VOI apps, Chat and Email are other options for communicating with parents and friends. You may or may not have internet access in your residence, but you will most likely have access to an internet café or bookstore where you can pay to use the internet for a period of time. Also, be aware that wireless internet access is less common abroad, and can incur high fees. If living with a host family, always ask before assuming it is okay to connect.

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning



Packing

Planning is an important part of packing, but you also need to be prepared for the unexpected. Try to pack as little as you can while still meeting your needs. You will likely have to carry your own luggage, so be sure that it is as small and light as possible. Remember that you will be acquiring things during your time abroad, so save space for souvenirs. Check with your airline to determine the sizes of luggage that you can have, and remember that you may have to pay a fee to check luggage. Label each piece of luggage with your name and permanent address inside and out.

When packing clothing, choose items that can be mixed and matched to maximize options in your wardrobe. Pack layering pieces so that you will be prepared for different weather conditions. Clothing that is easy to care for and/or hand wash is ideal since you may not have access to laundry facilities often, or it may be expensive.

Research your host country to determine what kind of clothing the locals wear. For example, many European locals dress in darker, more formal clothing than Americans. We recommend trying to fit in as much as possible so that you are less likely to be targeted as a tourist.

When packing toiletries, make sure to follow the airline guidelines for liquids. Remember that most places will have basic toiletries, so unless you are using specialized products, pack few toiletries and plan on buying more in your host

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

country. Trying new products can help you to feel more immersed in the culture that you are visiting.

If you pack electrical items, check the voltage and make sure that it will work in the host country. Most countries use electricity at approximately 220 volts, while North America uses 110 volts. Dual voltage items work with either voltage and should have a label on them that indicates “INPUT: AC 100V - 240V, 50/60Hz.” If your item does not have dual voltage, it will say something like “INPUT: AC 120V, 60Hz or INPUT: AC 240V, 50Hz.” If your item is not dual voltage, you will need a voltage converter. You will also need plug adapters with either type of voltage so that the plug can physically fit in the outlet. Plug adapters are small attachments to your appliance plugs that enable the plug to fit into an outlet with a different shape. They typically come in packs with adapters for multiple countries. It may be more practical to purchase small appliances such as hair dryers and alarm clocks once you arrive in order to avoid the cost of purchasing adapters and converters as well as to minimize the weight and space in your luggage.

Carefully pack your carry-on luggage so that you are prepared in the event of a lost suitcase. If your flight is delayed or canceled you will most likely not have access to your checked baggage. Be sure that you have a change of clothing in your carry-on, as well as all of your important items and documents. This includes all of your prescription medications, eyeglasses, passport, Medical Insurance Card, etc., and copies of those. Do not pack anything in your checked luggage that you would be devastated to lose. You should also pack a water bottle (although it must be empty until passing security), snacks, and reading material in your carry-on.



Voltage Converter



Plug Adapters

Packing Checklist

Required Items:

- Passport!
- Visa(s) if needed
- Airline tickets/confirmation

Section 1: Pre-Departure Planning

- Information from your program or school confirming location, acceptance, etc.
- Money, credit cards, traveler's checks
- Insurance Card(s)
- Prescriptions (enough to last the entire trip)
- Emergency contact information
- Photocopies of your important documents. (See page 10)

Strongly Recommended Items:

- Guidebooks and information about your host country
- Extra passport-sized photos (in case your passport is lost or stolen, or for ID cards overseas)
- This handbook
- Glasses, contact lenses and solution
- Immunization/health records
- Small first aid kit
- Mix and match clothing
- Necessary toiletries (including feminine hygiene products)
- Camera
- Rain jacket/umbrella
- Comfortable shoes
- Swimsuit

Other Helpful Items:

- Money belt/pouch
- Travel towel/washcloth
- Small gift for host family
- Small flashlight
- Lock for your bag
- Flip flops or shower shoes
- Sunscreen/bug repellent
- A set of "nice" clothes for special occasions

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

Overcoming Jet Lag

Before departure, make sure to get a good night's sleep. Beginning a program "sleep-deprived" will only make jet lag worse. Avoid rushing on the day of your departure. Have everything packed and ready to go beforehand.

During the journey, wear loose-fitting clothes for comfort. You may want to remove your shoes in flight, as feet often swell. Drink lots of liquids to prevent dehydration, which often happens on long flights. Avoid alcohol and caffeine as they contribute to dehydration.

After arriving in your host country, try to maintain as normal a schedule as possible according to your new time zone in order to reset your body clock. Go to sleep at a regular hour for your destination. Take care of your body and realize that it will take a few days for you to adjust. Plan accordingly and don't over-exert your body.

Housing

Housing options at your host university will vary. You may be assigned to a residence hall, apartment/flat, or homestay. Please keep in mind that the accommodations in your host country may not be as luxurious as you are accustomed to at home, so keep an open mind. For example, electricity, heat, and water usage are often limited or more expensive than in the U.S. Be conservative by turning off lights and appliances when not in use, taking shorter showers, and using clothing and blankets to cope with weather changes. In addition, you may find a bathtub instead of a shower, radiators instead of central heating, and different styles of toilets.

“Enjoy it. Don't be afraid of putting yourself out there and really question everything you've never had the time to do before. It's easy to get caught up in a routine at home. However, being abroad also means being away. Take time to enjoy yourself. Immerse yourself.

-Alejandra, past study abroad participant in Spain

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

Homestay

If your host university offers the option of homestay you will have a great opportunity to expand your cultural experience beyond the university. Remember that while the host family will typically receive a stipend to cover the costs of your room and/or board, the money rarely compensates for their willingness and expense to open their home to you. If you choose homestay, here are some general recommendations:

- Bring a small gift (worth no more than \$20) such as a Ball State item, a cookbook of American recipes, or a CD of American music (blues, jazz, etc.).
- Ask at the beginning of your stay about the family schedule and house rules. Are there expectations to participate in family activities? Do they expect you to be at family meals? Do they want to know when you'll be out late or gone for the weekend? Will they allow you to have guests? Be prepared to follow their rules, and remember that you are a guest in their home.
- Ask about the rules for phone use. In many countries, even local service may be very expensive. Families may prefer that you make calls from another location. Also ask about appropriate hours for receiving incoming calls, and if there are any restrictions on internet use, if applicable.
- If meals are included in your homestay, don't skip them without letting your hosts know well in advance.
- Don't snack from the family refrigerator or pantry without asking. Also ask where you can keep food of your own.
- Offer to help with household tasks.
- Be open, flexible, and don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Although many host families are interested in interaction with international students, they are also being paid for their services, and in some cases consider it to be their income. While you should expect your family to provide a safe, clean living environment, adequate meals, and a polite, respectful atmosphere, the amount of personal interaction may vary from family to family.
- If your family is truly unreasonable or if you are uncomfortable with your family, you should consult with your host university coordinator or Faculty Director.

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

At the Airport

Never leave your baggage unattended. If you see anything suspicious, notify security personnel. When landing in airports abroad, don't be surprised to see military guards or police. They are there to protect you.

In Your Host Community

Know your surroundings. Find out which parts of town are considered risky by the locals. As in the United States, always stay in well-lit and well-traveled areas. Be especially alert in crowded places, as they are likely to be a place for thieves and muggers. When possible, avoid places frequented by large numbers of Americans, especially military personnel. Avoid large groups of people, as it draws more attention. Of course, never go anywhere with strangers. If your destination is having political or military demonstrations, stay away from all sites of such activity.

Avoid being a target by dressing or behaving blatantly American. Some people may have biases if they know that you are an American. Try blending in with the locals as much as possible. Wear little, if any, jewelry or expensive brand names so as not to appear like you have money that's just waiting to be stolen. Also, don't use expensive electronic items in public, which can attract attention. Leaving them at home is the best option.

Come in with a completely open mind, even academically. If you do not, things are twice as hard.

-Amanda, past study abroad

If you choose to use a money belt or "neck safe," make sure to wear it under clothing. Wearing it over clothing will be a sure sign to thieves that you have money to steal! If you do not use a money belt, make sure to keep cash and important documents hidden. Keep backpacks, purses, and other bags zipped closed and close to your body. Keep your wallet in your front pocket, and do not make a big display of pulling out your wallet when you make a purchase. NEVER leave belongings unattended for any length of time. When sitting in a restaurant or traveling on public transportation, remain aware of your belongings. Keep an arm or foot through the strap at all times. Thieves can pose as porters or taxi drivers; so be careful to whom you give your luggage.

Watch out for people begging and kids who may try to confuse you by swarming around. Also be aware of people who "give" you something for free, such as a flower or hand-made jewelry. These people will usually then turn to someone else you are with and ask for payment for the "gift."

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

When Traveling

Use common sense. Avoid traveling alone. Try to make friends, but do not be too trusting. If you do travel alone, make sure someone else knows your itinerary and find a place to stay before dark. Be very cautious of people who offer you rooms. Avoid following a strict schedule that would allow someone to easily find you. Stay smart and trust your instincts. Walk confidently as if you know exactly where you are going, even if that means walking around the block twice. Try to always wear comfortable and functional shoes. Whenever possible, speak the local language.

For women, learn as much as possible about the social customs of the culture you are about to visit. This will help you to avoid difficult situations. In some countries, mere eye contact from a woman is considered flirting. Do not wear questionable clothing that could be considered provocative. You may consider it to be acceptable, but the culture of your host country may not agree. Pay attention to what local women are wearing. Always speak clearly and emphatically if you want to be left alone.

Being an American Abroad

As an American abroad, you will be exposed to different perspectives, particularly in times of international conflict or political unrest. You should be aware that the media coverage and public opinions in your host country might differ from those back home. It is important to keep an open mind. If you try to learn from these differences, you are likely to develop a better understanding of your own culture.

If you are dealing with anti-American sentiment, ask your critics questions that may explain the person's beliefs about the United States and why he or she might hold them. Does this person get ideas from the media? Is this something being taught in school? Has this person experienced some sort of harassment from an American? If you understand the critic's motive(s), or where his or her information comes from, perhaps you can find some common ground and a more tolerant way to respond.

Try to avoid becoming defensive if your culture is being criticized. Keep an open mind and remember to try and understand your critic's motives. Become familiar with common U.S. facts and policies. It is a common belief overseas that Americans

“They’ll be whipping out facts left and right about their countries, and the government, the history—anything. And then they’ll ask me [about the U.S.] and I’ll be like, ‘ehhh...’”

-Donna, past study abroad participant

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

are uneducated about world affairs. How can you dispel that stereotype? People in other countries will probably ask you a lot of questions about the United States on such varied topics such as geography, politics, pop culture, etc. They may be intelligent questions like, “Who decides whether a person is guilty of a crime?” and they may be simple questions like “Do all Americans wear cowboy hats and ride horses?” However, it is not uncommon to find that people overseas know a lot more about U.S. politics and policies than you do. You should familiarize yourself with basic U.S. facts and policies because you do not want to appear uneducated or ignorant. Some areas of suggestion are: U.S. geography, political system, judicial system, and foreign policy. As always, if the conversation becomes aggressive, leave.

Culture Shock

The process of adjusting to a new environment is commonly known as “culture shock.” It is a response to being in a situation where everything is different from your previous experiences, including language/slang, food, transportation, body language, and everyday activities.

The phases of culture shock are:

1. Initial Euphoria: Everything seems wonderful and exciting during this phase, which lasts for the first few hours, days, or weeks.
2. Irritation and Hostility: Once the initial “honeymoon” phase subsides, differences between home and host cultures seem more pronounced. You may feel frustration, insecurity, negativity about host culture, glorification of home culture, withdrawal, and/or depression.
3. Gradual Adjustment: With time, you’ll begin to orient yourself to a different set of cultural practices and feel increasingly comfortable and confident in your new surroundings.
4. Adaptation and Biculturalism: In this phase, you are able to function in two cultures with confidence.

“After two or three weeks, that’s when it hit me...I came to a point where I wanted to go home; I didn’t want to be there anymore. But then I got over that and was fine”

-Beth, past study abroad participant

Tips for minimizing culture shock:

- Realize that it is normal! Be prepared to handle culture shock and homesickness, but don’t dwell on it. Staying positive is the best way to minimize negative feelings. Listen to upbeat music, do things that make you happy, and keep a sense of humor.

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

- Try not to judge things as “good” or “bad,” but merely “different.”
- Get busy! The sooner you can establish a regular routine of things to do, the sooner your emotions will stabilize. It doesn’t seem to matter what you fill your schedule with; what is important is that you are getting involved and maintaining some kind of structure.
- Journal, blog, or email. Journaling and letter writing have many benefits that can help alleviate anxieties, and also give you something to look back on, however for security reasons, limit postings on social media.
- Manage the amount of contact you have with home. Too much or too little can both be detrimental.
- Talk to a friend or mentor before you leave about culture shock and how you can contact them while abroad. It helps to have someone who understands what you’re going through when you’re feeling down.

Diversity Abroad

As in the United States, some societies and groups are more open to accepting diversity than others. People react differently to looks and behaviors they are not accustomed to or that appear unusual. Study abroad experiences of students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are varied, from those who felt exhilarated by being free of the U.S. context of race relations, to those who experienced different degrees of curiosity about their ethnicity.

You may have to deal with the possibility of outright racism abroad, the possibility of insensitive attitudes and inadequate facilities for students with disabilities, or the presence of homophobia towards gay and lesbian students. Preparing for what to expect in a particular country can make the difference between a wonderful experience abroad and an unpleasant one.

Disability

The United States is often more advanced in the area of equal access for persons with disabilities. Many other countries are becoming more aware of the needs of the disability community but may not have the same level of access within their infrastructure. An important part of your study abroad experience will include learning how the host country defines and

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

– Mark Twain

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

responds to needs of persons with disabilities according to their culture. The first step to receiving assistance for your accommodation needs abroad is to discuss it with the Rinker Center and Student Disability Services.

Sexual Orientation

Before you go, learn the laws pertaining to LGBT populations in the countries you plan to visit. Reflect on the culturally based ideas and definitions of sexual identity and consider carefully that how your identity as a LGBT person may affect your relationships with host nationals, your cultural adjustment, and your overall education abroad experience.

Academic Differences

Adjusting to a new system may be compared to the feeling you have in Ball State courses prior to taking the first exam. You usually understand the discussion and lectures, but not until you take the first exam do you really understand what you are being asked to retain. You may feel this way throughout your semester abroad. Every host country will be somewhat unique, but here are a few general points to keep in mind:

- Although it may not be explicitly stated, attendance is important.
- You may attend lectures, but a large share of the classroom time may be spent in small tutorial and seminar groups. You may be asked to be an equal contributor to these discussions.
- Your reading will not usually be based on a textbook or directed in the detailed way that is common at Ball State. If you are told: “You may wish to have a look at these specific titles,” it implies strong advice that those books should be read!
- Don’t rely on being told exactly what to do or when to do it. In many cases, the professor may be expecting you to be reading on your own and ask you for original research and thought in the exam essays. You will be expected to provide your own motivation and to assume responsibility for your own education and learning, and

“I would recommend a strong emphasis on reading throughout the semester to prepare for the exam at the end. These exams can be very difficult and sadly, you can't bring up your grade with the next tests or assignments like in the US. I found all of my professors to be very well qualified and I had no problems approaching them as an exchange student. You should be brave, and feel comfortable explaining your situation”

-Amy, past study abroad participant in Germany

Section 2: Arrival in Host Country

not to simply wait to be taught the course material.

- Exams will likely be essay-type. Before you take your first exam, ask for clarification of the grading system. This will help alleviate any surprises when you receive your results!
- Accessibility of professors will often be less than in the U.S. Professors may have limited or no office hours. You should make every attempt to speak with your professors if you have questions about course content or academic performance expectations.
- Student support services and office hours are generally less extensive than what you may be accustomed to. You must actively seek information as to how the services work at your host university.

Section 3: Re-Entry

Reverse Culture Shock

Coming home is an adjustment and integration into your life of what you have learned abroad. Realize that some of your values will have changed while abroad. Don't be afraid to talk about issues with family, friends, and other returnees. You may experience the following challenges:

- **Family:** You may be expected to fit back into your family but find it difficult to communicate effectively because your family has not shared your experiences overseas. Your family may have difficulty adjusting to your new-found independence and changed values. Share your experiences with your family (pictures, stories, etc.) and let them know how much you appreciate having had the opportunity to grow in new ways.
- **Friends:** You and your friends may no longer be as close as you once were. You need to be sensitive about discussing your experience with them, as they may be jealous and not interested in hearing story after story of how much fun you had. Ask about and listen to what they have experienced while you were away. Try and do new things together to get the relationship on a new footing. You may also miss the friends you made overseas. Keep in touch through email, Skype, or letter writing.
- **School:** You may see your campus in a new light. You may also miss the feeling of being part of a close-knit group of students. Talk over your academic experience with your advisor, especially if you are considering new career goals.
- **Country:** Your home culture may no longer be entirely to your liking and you may have the sense that you no longer fit in. In the future you will probably continue to evaluate ideas and events in the context of the broader cultural perspective you have acquired. Come to terms with the fact that we all tend to look past the shortcomings of our home culture when we are away, and to criticize it because of changed perspectives when we return.



“To other people it was a trip. Like ‘How was your trip?’ For me it was this whole section of my life. It was my life for three or four months.”

-Donna, past study abroad participant



Section 3: Re-Entry

- Self: You have been accustomed to a high level of activity and anticipation that your home and campus cannot possibly match. You may feel restless or a bit depressed for a while after you return. Recuperate from the physical journey. Think about the ways that you have changed: What did you learn about yourself? How have your family and friends reacted? Keep a journal so that you can see how your thoughts evolve over time. Talk with other returning students who feel the same way.

Build on Your Experience

After you return from your study abroad program, you will probably miss the excitement of learning another culture and seeing new things. There are ways that you can carry that momentum forward!

- Contact the Rinker Center and ask how you can get involved with activities for international students. There are many foreign students that you can meet and learn from.
- Contact the Rinker Center and ask how you can get involved with helping other students who are preparing to go abroad.
- Can't stop thinking about going abroad again? Look into a second study abroad program, or think about interning, volunteering, or working abroad. Contact the Rinker Center for more information.
- Make friends with common interests of international or intercultural affairs.
- Continue your learning by taking language or international affairs courses.
- Keep up with news of your host country by reading newspapers, magazines, etc.



Section 4: Resources

You may find the following websites helpful while researching for your study abroad program. Let your study abroad advisor know if you'd like more information.

General

- The U.S. State Department: www.studentsabroad.state.gov
- General guides and articles: www.transitionsabroad.com
- Guide to culture, etiquette, customs, and more: www.culturecrossing.net

Embassy/Consulate Information

- U.S. Embassies and Consulate Offices abroad: www.usembassy.gov
- Foreign consulate offices in the U.S.: www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/

Travel Information

- The internet guide to hostelling: www.hiusa.org
- STA Travel: www.statravel.com

Safety Information/Emergency

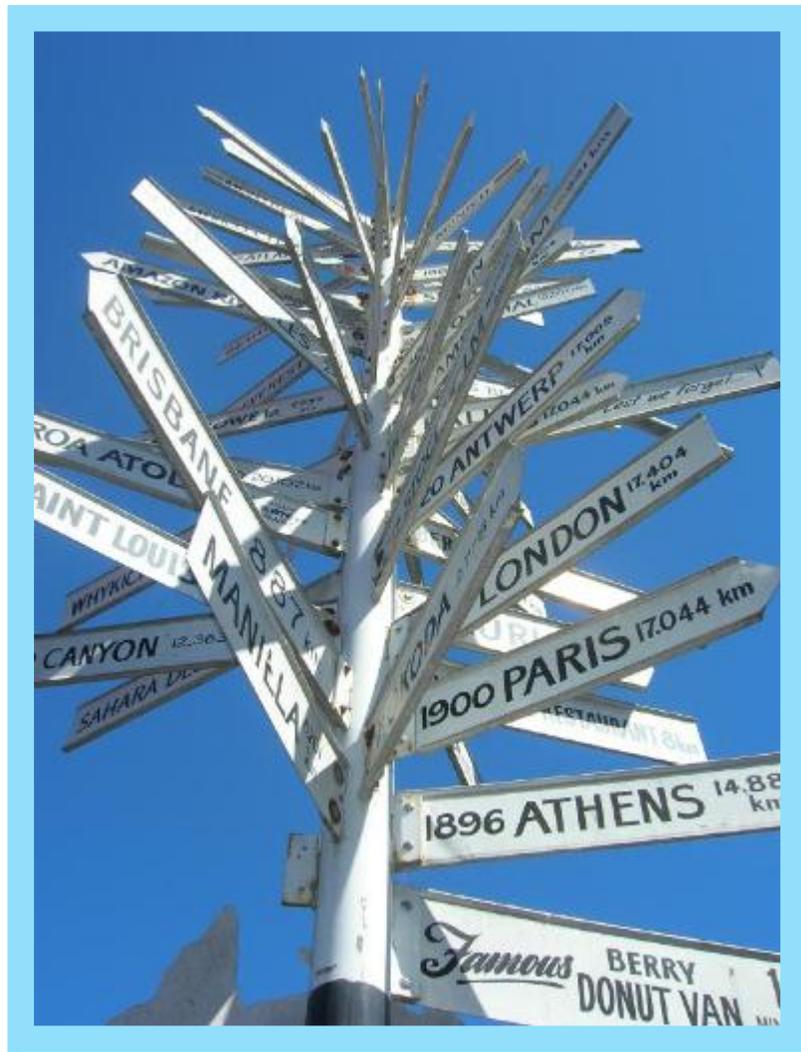
- U.S. State Department study abroad information: www.studentsabroad.state.gov

Financial Information:

- OANDA currency converter: www.oanda.com/currency/converter

Diversity

- Brown University's guide to diversity abroad: <https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/special-programs/international-study/student-resources/while-abroad/diversity-while-abroad>
- Resources for women abroad: www.transitionsabroad.com/listings/travel/women/index.shtml
- Links and resources for traveling with a disability: www.miusa.org
- Additional articles and resources on traveling with a disability: www.transitionsabroad.com/listings/travel/disability/index.shtml
- Country-specific resources and information related to LGBT issues: www.iglhrc.org
- A world-wide network of national and local LGBT groups: www.ilga.org



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