



ACADEMIC
STUDIES
ABROAD



Pre-Departure Guide for All Programs

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ASA Contact Info

Please see the ASA Site-Specific Guide for your program location and the ASA Parent and Family Guidebook for additional pre-departure information.

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Preparing to Travel

- **Ensure your Passport and Green Card (if applicable) are valid for at least 6 months beyond your intended stay abroad.** Carry a photocopy of these, save a digital copy to cloud storage, and share a digital copy with a trusted person at home that they can save.
- **If you have a visa for your host country, carry a photocopy of it, save a digital copy to cloud storage, and share a digital copy with a trusted person at home that they can save.**
- Be prepared in case you lose access to your phone and other digital devices: carry hard copies of all your supporting documents. **ON A PIECE OF PAPER, WRITE all important contact phone numbers (parents/guardians, other emergency contacts, ASA Site Director, and your home country embassy in your destination) and carry this with you during your travels.** This ensures you have this information even if your phone is lost or battery dies.
- You will be **CROSSING BORDERS. If you are questioned or they request to search your personal belongings, remain calm and do not be combative.** Request to call your emergency contacts if you are detained.

Preparing to Travel

- **DO NOT attempt to travel with any illegal items – this includes all cannabis/CBD products.**
- **Carry all prescription medication** in the original containers with labels showing your name, prescriber, etc. in your carry on luggage.
- **If you have been advised to have a Doctor's Letter to accompany your prescriptions, carry that letter with your Passport** and be prepared to show Customs Agents at your port of entry.
- **If you're a dual citizen of the US and another country**, bring your US passport with you when you depart for your program, even if you're using your other passport to enter your host country – because you'll need your US passport to re-enter the US later.
- **If you're an international student studying in the US and participating on an ASA program**, ensure your I-20 or DS-2019 is up to date with your major and has a valid, RECENT travel signature from your home institution's international office. Carry a copy of this during your travels. Save a digital copy of this and your US visa to cloud storage, and share a digital copy with a trusted person at home that they can save.

Packing

You may find that you'll blend in better if you dress a bit "nicer" while abroad. This doesn't mean you need to shop for new clothes; however, you are advised against wearing extremely casual clothing in public, such as sweatpants, yoga pants, pajamas, lounge pants, flip flops, etc. Keep in mind, you may visit churches or religious sites which often prohibit sleeveless tops, midriff blouses, short shorts, and short skirts.

In Europe, people tend to: 1) Wear dark/neutral colors (black, gray, beige, brown). 2) Re-wear the same outfits/clothing several times, even in the same week. People tend to own less clothing because homes/apartments (and therefore, storage space) is much more limited than in the US. You'll find that clothes washing machines are much smaller, too. Do as the locals do – don't be afraid to re-wear your clothes! Bring fewer clothes that you can mix and match!

You will be walking MUCH more than you normally do, so you must bring flat shoes that are comfortable for walking long distances! Many European cities have cobblestone, and ANY sort of heel (even a low heel) can cause sprained or broken ankles and broken shoes. Please leave your high heels at home! Trust us – it's not worth spending your semester abroad on crutches! (It has happened.)



HELPFUL TIPS

DO NOT OVERPACK!

You will regret it as you are responsible for carrying your own luggage at all times.

Leave room for any local shopping you may do.

You will need to bring or buy items marked "No".
If your program is **not** listed, all items below **are** provided.

Program Location	Housing Type	Is bedding provided?	Are towels provided?	Is kitchen equipment provided?
Buenos Aires	Shared Apartment (Semester program only)	Yes	No	Yes
Dublin (Maynooth Univ)	Residence Hall	Yes	No	No*
London (Uni of Roehampton)	Residence Hall	Yes	No	Yes
Maastricht	Residence Hall	Yes	No	Yes
San José	Homestay	Yes	No	N/A
Sevilla	Residence Hall	Yes	Yes	No
Viña del Mar	Homestay	Yes	No	N/A

Please consider the carbon impact and landfill space before you discard any convenience items purchased while overseas.

Donate those extra clothes, hair dryers, flat irons, or other electrical equipment to local charities, thrift stores, churches or shelters. Google "Where to donate used goods in <host city name>" and a bunch of suggestions show up! Reuse, Reduce, Recycle!

* = Do not bring kitchen equipment with you or purchase any until you have spoken to your roommates - items may already have been purchased or left behind by students in previous semesters.



Packing List

All of the toiletries listed here can be purchased when you arrive, so unless you use a brand you cannot live without, bring only enough to last you the first week or so - you can buy more of what you need when you arrive.

- Antiperspirant
- Shampoo, soap, toothpaste, toothbrush
- Sunscreen
- Over-the-counter meds, such as Advil, Pepto, etc.
- Vitamins
- Band-aids, Neosporin
- Hand sanitizer
- Dramamine (if you are prone to motion sickness)
- Feminine hygiene products, if you like a specific kind
- Contraceptives (Condoms only, Birth Control Pills must be Rx from US)
- Glasses, contact lenses, solution, eye glass Rx
- Prescription Medication (Pack in carry-on! - More info below)
- Laptop and Charger
- 1 or 2 universal plug adapters; converters
- Cell phone and charger
- Portable phone charger/power pack
- TSA-approved luggage locks
- Backpack
- Sunglasses
- Small gift for your host family, if staying in homestay
- Credit Card, ATM Card/Debit Card
- Money Belt
- Refillable Water Bottle
- Rolling duffle bag, or small rolling bag for weekend trips
- Digital camera
- Playing cards (for long train rides or locations with no wi-fi)
- Umbrella (optional, you can also purchase if needed)

HELPFUL TIPS

- In many countries, deodorant is more common than antiperspirant
- Higher SPF sunscreen may be hard to find in some locations
- You will/may not be able to find the EXACT same over-the-counter meds abroad, so we strongly recommend you bring what you may need or look for the equivalent
- Tampons are typically the O.B. type; In South America, tampons are typically available only in big cities
- Money Belt - safest way to carry your passport and money as it is worn under your clothes



Watch this short [video](#) for more advice on what to pack!

What NOT to pack

- **US Dollars in cash** - If you exchange USD\$ for the local currency, you will lose money on the exchange
- **Discover credit card** - Usually NOT accepted outside USA
- **Knives of any kind**, including Swiss Army, mace, pepper spray, Kubaton, weapons, or other self-defence paraphernalia. All of these could be illegal in your host country and possession could get you arrested
- **Valuables, family heirlooms, expensive jewelry, expensive handbags**
- **Pre-paid phone cards** - They will not work overseas, plus Whatsapp, Zoom and Facetime are much better options
- **Clothing that wrinkles easily or requires dry cleaning or hand washing**
- **American hairdryer, flat iron, or curling iron UNLESS it is a "travel" version with 110/220V conversion capabilities**
- **Room decorations and storage bins**
- **Expectations that services and amenities will be as they are in the USA** - You should expect things to not always go as planned and consider it a blessing when they do ;)

HELPFUL TIPS

- In many countries in South America, USD\$ are accepted but you will pay a lower price if you use local currency
- College, university, fraternity or sorority clothing, or USA flag clothing, as well as baseball caps will immediately identify you as "a foreigner"--you're welcome to wear your gear, but consider the attention it may draw to you
- Flip flops (aka, slippers, thongs) are considered "shower shoes" in most countries outside the USA, you're welcome to wear them, but again, consider the attention you will garner



Watch this short [video](#) for more advice on what NOT to pack!

How to carry your important documents

Make photocopies, or take photos on the phone you plan to take abroad, of all your important documents, such as passport, visa (if applicable), credit cards (front and back), driver's license, ID cards, medical insurance cards, etc.

Save one set of these photos on your phone and then one set in the cloud - Share your cloud copies with your parents, family or support person.



Driver's License

Bring your driver's license to use as everyday ID, but remember, your US driver's license DOES not automatically give you permission to drive in your host country.



Passport

You MUST carry a photocopy of your passport (and visa, if applicable) with you at all times. Do NOT carry your passport with you UNLESS you are traveling. When not traveling, keep in locked suitcase.



Medical Insurance Card

You MUST carry your CISI or other medical insurance card or a photocopy of it with you at all times.

Plug Adapters & Voltage

There are 2 main things to think about when plugging in something abroad - 1) You'll need a plug adapter to make the American style plug fit into the outlet; 2) Is your device compatible with dual voltage?

Electricity in the USA is 110-120 volts; Abroad it is 220-240 volts.

Adapters: To make the plug fit into the outlet, you will need a PLUG ADAPTER. The shape of the outlet varies across the world, so to make sure you're prepared to go anywhere, we recommend you buy 2 **Universal Plug Adapters** in case one breaks or gets lost.



- Check the voltage of your device or appliance. If it says "110-240v" it is DUAL voltage and therefore safe to plug in with the correct plug adapter. If it says "110v" it is NOT SAFE to plug in! See the example of the label above.
- Travel versions of hairdryers, flat irons, shavers, etc. are available that are DUAL voltage. If you want, you can buy one before you leave, just remember to switch it to the correct voltage before you use it overseas!
- Most laptops and cell phone chargers are already compatible with both voltages - BUT always double check! If you plug in a device or appliance that is not dual voltage, you'll overheat and break your device, blow a fuse or start a fire!



Watch this short [video](#) for info about plug adapters and voltage!

Luggage

How many suitcases should I bring?

ONE large suitcase, ONE small suitcase (your carry-on, for weekend trips) and ONE backpack - That's it!

Storage space will be limited where you will be living and you will find it difficult to carry and store additional pieces of luggage.

You are responsible for transporting your luggage **YOURSELF** - In some cases, this may involve flights of stairs, escalators, elevators, cobblestone streets, etc. so be prepared.

HELPFUL TIPS

- Always pack your carry-on as if you won't receive your checked bags for 4-5 days
 - Include the following:
 - Extra clothes
 - Toiletries, contact solution, backup glasses
 - Laptop & Charger, Phone & Charger
- ASA Last-Minute Checklist
- Your local address abroad so you have it when you arrive and need to find transportation to your accommodation
- Take a photo of your luggage in case it gets lost or stolen

Airline Luggage Requirements

- Each airline has its own size/weight limits and fees for luggage, which can vary depending on which countries you are flying to/from. Check the luggage limits on the airline's website for EACH ticket you buy, even if it's an airline you've flown before.
- Short-haul flights and discount airlines (i.e., RyanAir) have very small luggage size/weight limits and are strict about enforcing them.
- If you buy tickets on different airlines for one trip, make sure your luggage complies with size and weight limits on both airlines.
- Regardless of airline, be aware you may be charged an extra fee if your bags are overweight.



Watch this short [video](#) for info about what to in your carry on!

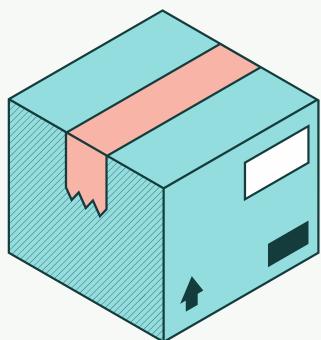
Shipping Packages Abroad: Do's and Don'ts

Do NOT plan to ship your clothing or other belongings ahead of your term abroad. It can be expensive and time consuming to ship packages overseas; the recipient usually has to pay customs taxes to pick up the package.



Use FedEx, UPS, DHL

If you need to ship items overseas, use international carriers. On customs forms, it is best to state: FOR PERSONAL USE ONLY - NO COMMERCIAL VALUE



ASA/Host School not responsible

You are responsible for receiving and paying for all packages. Neither ASA nor your host school will cover customs costs.



Overnight Mail

Usually takes 2 business days or more and can be very expensive.

Vaccinations

It is your responsibility to go to the CDC website (www.cdc.gov) and visit the Traveler's Health pages to look up the vaccine recommendations for your destination country and all other countries you plan to visit.

Please ask your doctor whether you should have a Meningitis vaccination or any other specific vaccinations before traveling overseas.

You are advised to obtain a copy of your immunization records before your departure and save a copy to the cloud so you can access it if necessary while overseas.

Please ensure all your immunizations appear on your record.



Typhoid & Yellow Fever

If you are planning to travel to remote areas of South America, it is recommended you receive the Typhoid and Yellow Fever vaccines. Please consult your personal health care provider for advice.



Plan Ahead!

Because some vaccines require multiple doses or you need to start a series of pills before departure to ensure protection, it's best to see your health care provider as soon as possible. Be sure to schedule your doses in advance of your departure to ensure all series are received. Take recommended medicines as directed.

COVID-19 & Study Abroad

COVID is still evolving with new variants and changing symptoms. If cases go up, you may see protocols increase such as masks, closures, etc. COVID protocols are controlled by local governments and health authorities and may be different from your home town or state in the US. You're required to comply with all COVID protocols not only in your host country, but in any other countries you travel to. If you don't comply, you can be fined, arrested, or dismissed from the program.

If you test positive outside your host country, you must follow the COVID protocols where you are at that time. If you must isolate, you may have to stay at a hotel at your own expense. For these reasons, we recommend having an emergency fund and/or credit card available to cover unexpected expenses such as lodging and food delivery.

You must notify ASA if you test positive or are exposed to a positive case, both before departure and during the program.

Effective with ASA programs that begin May 1, 2023 or later, ***we strongly recommend, but do not require***, that participants be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and up to date on COVID-19 booster shot(s) before going abroad – **WITH THE FOLLOWING EXCEPTION:**

1. Proof of up to date COVID-19 primary series* vaccination and booster shot(s) are required by the Payment Deadline for any students going to program locations where up to date vaccination is currently required by the local government or host institution. At this time, none of ASA's program locations require this, but if that changes, we will update this page.

*A primary series is the initial dose(s) of a COVID-19 vaccine. For Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines, the primary series is two vaccine doses. For the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) COVID-19 vaccine, the primary series is a single vaccine dose.

Full details about ASA's COVID-19 Vaccination Policy can be found here:
<https://www.academicstudies.com/coronavirus-future/updates>

Medical care for COVID-19 is covered by the CISI medical insurance you receive with the ASA program. COVID testing is covered if the test is ordered by a doctor in the course of treatment. The medical insurance you receive with the program covers you worldwide during your program dates, except in the US.

Here are some steps you can take to reduce your risk:

- Buy trip insurance
- Don't book non-refundable personal travel
- Follow CDC guidelines, including getting a booster shot if eligible
- Follow local protocols
- Self-monitor for symptoms and act accordingly
- If you plan to travel after the program ends purchase medical insurance to cover you
- Have an emergency fund.

Please talk to your doctor as soon as possible about getting the latest Covid booster shot and your eligibility.

Prescription Medication

Bring a letter from your doctor

A student going abroad with approved medication in the US, may need a letter from a US Doctor describing the medical condition and the prescription medications and doses, including the generic names of prescribed medications, if the medication is restricted in the host country. If you have a medical condition that may require attention during your time abroad, please have your doctor prepare a full summary of your condition and treatment so that you can be properly treated abroad. Bring one copy with you abroad; leave a second copy with your loved ones.



Keep Rx in original containers

Any medications being carried overseas MUST be stored in their original containers with clear and legible labels; Student's name must appear on Rx label.



Illegal in my host country?

You should check with the foreign embassy of the destination country to check whether any required medications are considered to be illegal narcotics. (Ex: Adderall, Vyvanse, Ritalin, Metadate, Concerta, and some other medications are considered controlled substances and are illegal to possess without a prescription or Doctor's Letter.)

Take Rx in carry on luggage

All prescription medication and medical paperwork (including copies of your prescriptions) MUST be packed in your carry-on luggage.



Wear Medical Alert bracelet

If you have allergies, reactions to certain medications, foods, or insect bites, or other unique medical problems, consider wearing a "medical alert" bracelet.

Availability of Prescription Medication

Bring enough for duration of program

If you take any prescription medication, you must bring enough to last the duration of your program. Contact your doctor at least 6 weeks before departure to make sure you can bring enough of your prescription medications to last your entire stay.

If you are unable to bring enough prescription medication for the entire duration of your stay abroad, notify ASA immediately at 617-327-9388.



While the insurance provided by ASA should cover the doctor visit necessary to obtain a prescription in-country, this is contingent upon the availability of your medication abroad. Not all medications are available in other countries!

Is my Rx available abroad?

Medications such as Ritalin**, Adderall**, Vyvanse**, Metadate**, Concerta**, Cylert, Wellbutrin, Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft and others are often not available outside the US. You may not be able to find the exact equivalent of your medication in other countries, and if your parents try to ship your medication to you, it will likely be confiscated by Customs.

**Adderall, Vyvanse, Ritalin, Metadate, and Concerta are considered controlled substances in some other countries, making it illegal to possess without a prescription. If you take one of these medications, you MUST bring a copy of your prescription and a letter from your doctor, and it is advisable that you contact the U.S. Consulate/Embassy in your destination country for guidance before departure.



Reminder...

When you return to the USA, please keep in mind that as a general rule, the FDA does not allow the importation of prescription drugs that were purchased outside the United States.

Over-the-Counter Medication & Pharmacies

Over-the-Counter Medication

Pharmacies abroad sell over-the-counter medications, such as aspirin, cold medicine, antihistamine, motion sickness pills, etc. that you can purchase without a prescription.

However, because over-the-counter formulas can vary from what you're used to taking, we strongly recommend you bring with you your preferred over-the-counter meds, in particular cold, flu and allergy medication, Imodium, Pepto-Bismal, etc.

It is a common myth that pharmacies in other countries can administer prescription medication, such as antibiotics, without a prescription. With a few exceptions, this is not true.



Going to a Doctor vs Going to a Pharmacy

In many foreign countries, people routinely go to a pharmacy for ailments that many Americans would see a doctor for. Examples: cough, cold, flu, fever, nausea/vomiting, rash, eye infection, birth control, bug bites, swelling, sunburn, etc. However, if you have a sinus infection, bronchitis or another illness that requires antibiotics, you will need to see a doctor in order to get antibiotics.

So, for example, you tell your Site Director or host family that you have a rash. They will probably tell you, "Go to the pharmacy." Do not be offended by this; they're not blowing you off, it is simply a cultural difference. You just go to the pharmacy, wait in line to speak with a pharmacist, tell him/her your symptoms and he/she will recommend a medication that you can purchase there, or recommend you see a doctor. If you purchase medication and you're not feeling better after taking it, do see a doctor immediately. Be sure to tell the pharmacist any allergies you have to medications or foods!

Always follow your instincts when it comes to your health. For example, if your condition has persisted or if you feel your condition is serious, don't hesitate to see a doctor, even if someone tells you to go to the pharmacy first!

Medical Care & Insurance

All ASA students (except from the University of Minnesota Duluth*) have comprehensive worldwide medical coverage through ASA's plan with Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI).

(*Students from University of Minnesota Duluth receive comprehensive medical insurance through their home institution instead of from ASA.)

ASA will E-MAIL you a CISI insurance card shortly before your program start date. BE SURE TO PRINT THE CARD AND PUT IT IN YOUR WALLET! You can download a copy of your insurance policy anytime on ASA's website [here](#).

(*Students from University of Minnesota Duluth should check with their home institution about receiving their insurance card prior to departure.)

Please download the "CISI Traveler" Mobile App. Then, go to this [link](#) to register your account and create a login. Once registered, you can login to your "CISI Traveler" Mobile App or login to the MyCISI online portal and have access to:

- Locate medical providers worldwide
- View/Email your insurance card and documents anytime (the mobile app has onscreen display of your insurance card)
- Offline document availability
- Claim help
- View country-specific travel alerts and warnings
- Learn more about the region to which you are traveling
- Personal security assistance information

HELPFUL TIPS

- If you get sick or injured while abroad, NOTIFY YOUR ASA SITE DIRECTOR IMMEDIATELY!
- If you receive ongoing medical treatment (such as psychotherapy, allergy shots, physical therapy, etc.) talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to continue treatment while abroad. If you do, contact ASA as soon as possible!

Medical Care & Insurance

Telemedicine visits (via mobile app or phone) are available for non-emergency illnesses/injuries through the **Doctor Please** group of providers.

The Doctor Please group of providers includes trained, licensed, and experienced doctors who are accustomed to patients traveling globally. Appointments can be arranged within your own time zone, according to your schedule. Doctors can also provide referrals and prescriptions.

If you can't download the app or have low bandwidth while traveling, you can connect by phone as opposed to mobile app.

HELPFUL TIPS

For life-threatening illnesses or injuries, always seek immediate, in-person medical care!



When should I use Doctor Please?

- You are seeking medical advice
- You have forgotten medicine and need a prescription for a chronic condition
- You have a non-emergency ailment and don't want to waste time in a hospital waiting room
- Doctor Please physicians diagnose and treat minor illnesses, injuries, infections, colds and allergies.



How to access Doctor Please?

- Contact by phone (number on your insurance card)
- AXA will verify eligibility and provide you with an activation code
- Download the app via Google Play or App Store
- Register and enter the access code
- Enter your personal details; request a video or call back
- Access to an MD via video or phone
- Coverage is based off your policy benefits and limits

Medical Care & Insurance

What does my ASA Medical Insurance cover?

ASA's policy with CISI covers your medical expenses (e.g. doctor visit, hospitalization, etc.) for up to \$250,000 per injury/sickness, including \$10,000 coverage for pre-existing conditions; \$100,000 Emergency Medical Evacuation coverage.

Coverage is provided for the official dates of your program.

You can download a copy of the medical insurance policy anytime on [ASA's website](#).



**If you attend University of Minnesota Duluth, please contact your Study Abroad Advisor at your institution to find out what is covered under your medical insurance policy.

What doctor or hospital should I go to?



Although the insurance will cover any doctor or hospital (public or private), CISI has "Preferred Providers", which means that the insurance company already has a billing agreement in place with the doctor, clinic or hospital, allowing the provider to bill CISI directly so you don't have to pay up front.

To locate a provider AND have CISI make the appointment for you, simply call the phone number on your insurance card or send an email to the address on your insurance card.

You can also use the "CISI Traveler" mobile app or the MyCISI online portal to locate medical providers worldwide.

HELPFUL TIPS
Be sure to bring your CISI insurance card to your appointment!

NOTE: If you don't go to a Preferred Provider, you will need to pay for your medical care up front and then file a claim with CISI to be reimbursed.

Medical Care & Insurance

If I pay for medical care out-of-pocket, how do I file a claim for CISI** to reimburse me?

1. Get an itemized receipt after paying for your medical care and keep any and all paperwork they give to you. CISI will reimburse you for medical expenses covered under the insurance plan, as long as you submit your claim and itemized medical receipts to the insurance company within 30 days of treatment.
2. You can easily submit claims online or via email! To submit a claim online, create your account (or sign into your existing account) on CISI's website: <https://www.mycisi.com/CISIPortalWeb> . To submit a claim by email, send a completed Claim Form and scans of your itemized receipts to: claimhelp@culturalinsurance.com. (You can download a Claim Form from the "CISI Traveler" mobile app, from the CISI website, or you can ask ASA to email you one.)
3. Be sure to put your permanent US address on the claim form and NOT your foreign address or college address.
4. CISI will typically process your claim and send you a reimbursement check in about 6 weeks. They will mail the check to the address you put on the claim form, so once again, be sure to put your permanent address.

**If you attend University of Minnesota Duluth, please contact your Study Abroad Advisor.

HELPFUL TIPS

If the hospital or doctor doesn't have you pay upon completion of your treatment, you should expect to receive a bill in the mail – possibly even after you return home!

If you receive a medical bill after your treatment is completed, simply email it to claimhelp@culturalinsurance.com along with a completed claim form, and CISI will pay the hospital directly.

Medical Care & Insurance

Can I extend my insurance coverage if I'll be traveling before or after the ASA program dates?

No, it is not possible to extend your ASA-provided insurance coverage before or past the official last date of your ASA program. If you plan to travel before or after the official last date of your ASA program, we strongly recommend you purchase international medical insurance to cover the duration of your travels.

Here are a few insurance companies you can contact for supplemental coverage outside the official program dates:

- www.culturalinsurance.com
- www.insuremytrip.com
- www.geo-blue.com

If you attend University of Minnesota Duluth, please contact your Study Abroad Advisor.

HELPFUL TIPS

IF YOU HAVE A LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS OR INJURY ANYTIME DURING YOUR PROGRAM, YOU CAN CONTACT YOUR ASA SITE DIRECTOR AND/OR THE 24-HOUR EMERGENCY NUMBER LISTED ON YOUR MEDICAL INSURANCE CARD!



Money, Banking & Budgeting

HELPFUL TIPS

- Currency exchange rates fluctuate daily. €1 or £1 is not equal to \$1.
EXAMPLE: If the current exchange rate is €1 = \$1.18, this means that every €20 you spend actually costs you \$23.58. The exchange rate can make things more expensive, so watch out!
- The best way to keep track of the exchange rate and how much you're spending is to check www.xe.com OR download the "XE Currency" app to your phone. This has real-time exchange rates, so you can check the app before making a purchase to see how much you are spending in US dollars. The app logo looks like this:



Money Do's and Don'ts

- DON'T bring US cash or travelers checks. You will lose money when you exchange the currency. The best way to get cash abroad is to use your ATM card at an ATM machine.
- DO bring an ATM/debit card, as well as a credit card (for emergencies).
- DO make sure your ATM/debit card has a 4-digit PIN (not 5-digit).
- DO make sure your ATM/debit card says MasterCard, Visa, Cirrus, or Plus. If it doesn't, it will probably not work abroad.
- DO notify your bank and credit card company that you'll be abroad and for how long. Notify them of any and all countries you may visit. If you don't notify them, they will assume the foreign transactions are fraudulent and cancel your card. It will take at least 2 weeks for you to get a replacement card if yours is canceled!
- DO ask your bank and credit card company if they charge a foreign transaction fee. (Definition below.) If they do, consider switching to Schwab Bank for your ATM/debit card, and getting a different credit card that doesn't charge a foreign transaction fee (see next section for details on this).
- DO understand how exchange rates work!
- DO spend conservatively during your first few weeks until you get used to factoring in the exchange rate.
- DO budget your money for your entire program. Many students overspend during the first few weeks and then run out of money later. Setting up a budget will help avoid this.
- DO try a different bank's ATM machine if the first one you try doesn't accept your card. In some places, you may have to try several different banks' ATM machines before you find one that will work.



Pound - United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland
NOTE: Following the coronation of King Charles, currency will be updated. You may be asked to turn in your paper currency for new bills with the King's portrait.



Euro - Italy, Spain, France, Netherlands, Republic of Ireland, etc.



Peso - Argentina



Peso - Chile



Colon - Costa Rica



Watch this short video about [money and banking](#) and watch this video about [budgeting](#)!

Banking Recommendations

A foreign transaction fee is typically 2-3% of a debit/credit transaction and is charged by some banks and credit card companies. Call your bank and credit card company to find out if they will charge a foreign transaction fee on debit/credit purchases.

Consider other options:

- ✓ You can open a checking account with Schwab Bank*. There is no foreign transaction fee for debit transactions, and you are reimbursed for ATM (cash withdrawal) fees. Be sure to apply for this several weeks before departure to ensure you receive your card in time. Go to www.schwab.com – click Schwab Bank Checking.
- ✓ Search Google for: “credit card without foreign transaction fee”. There are dozens of different credit cards out there that do not charge a foreign transaction fee. Again, if you plan to apply for a new card, be sure to do this several weeks before departure.

*ASA has no affiliation with Schwab Bank.

Always read the fine print before opening any bank account or credit card.



What expenses are NOT included in the ASA program** that I should budget for?

1. Meals, unless you are living in a homestay and meals are provided
2. Meals on excursions
3. Books, materials, and course fees
4. Local transportation
5. Spending money, personal expenses, laundry
6. Transportation back to the airport at the end of the program
7. Housing and other ASA services during the break between semesters or terms
8. Cell phone and data plan

**The list above is a general list for all programs. For more detailed budget information, please refer to the [ASA Site-Specific Guide](#) for your program location.

Cell Phones

STEP 1: GET YOUR PHONE UNLOCKED BY CALLING YOUR CELL PHONE CARRIER. This lets you use a SIM card or e-SIM from any carrier worldwide. Call your carrier at least a couple weeks before you leave.

STEP 2: BEFORE YOU LEAVE, SET UP AN INTERNATIONAL PLAN WITH YOUR CARRIER so you have a working phone for your first week or so.

STEP 3: AFTER YOU ARRIVE, BUY A SIM CARD to use the rest of the term. This will be cheaper long term.

Your ASA Site Director can recommend local carriers after you arrive.

It's MANDATORY to maintain a paid, working international calling, text, and data plan throughout your program.



What about travel to other countries?

The SIM card or e-SIM you buy after arrival may work in other countries. Check that before traveling. If it doesn't, you may be able to change your SIM plan to cover additional countries, or you can purchase international data cheaply through apps like Airalo (www.airalo.com) or Holafly (<https://esim.holafly.com/>).

Cell Phones

What are Airalo and Holafly, and how do they work?

Airalo and Holafly are apps with an eSIM store where you can buy international data for different countries. You install an eSIM on your phone and buy data for your desired country or region. Your phone must be unlocked and compatible with eSIM. *There are both pros and cons to these apps, explained below.*

Can I make calls, video calls, and send texts with Airalo or Holafly?

Yes, but only through apps like Whatsapp, FaceTime, etc. That's why it's mandatory that within a few days of arriving, you get a SIM with a call, text, and data plan. Over time, this will be cheaper AND safer than Airalo or Holafly.

Downsides of Airalo & Holafly



- 1)** You can't make/receive network-based phone calls or SMS, which means you can't direct dial your ASA Site Director, emergency services (112), or other local phone numbers. That lack of functionality can impact your safety. **If you have an emergency you'd need to:** A) Use the Safeture app that ASA provides you, which can call emergency services. Or B) Go to your phone settings and switch to your US SIM before making the call. Note: Switching to your US SIM will activate a charge from your US carrier, and will only work if your US phone plan is still active/paid while you're abroad.
- 2)** If you forget to turn off your US SIM, you'll incur international charges from your US carrier! Remember to turn off your US SIM in your phone settings.
- 3)** Your phone/device must support eSIM. Check yours: <https://www.airalo.com/help/about-airalo/what-devices-support-esim>

Cell Phones

	US carrier international plan	SIM purchased in country	Airalo / Holafly
Bottom line	Best solution for departure and first week	Best long-term solution	Short-term travel to other countries only
Talk, Text, Data?	Yes	Yes	No – data only
Works as soon as you land?	Yes, if you set it up before you leave	No – must purchase onsite	Yes, if you set it up before you leave
Works in other countries?	Yes	Sometimes, it depends on the carrier	Only if you buy plans for additional countries
Emergency Calling?	Yes	Yes	No. To call emergency services, you'd need to use the Safeture app
Direct dial Site Director & other local numbers?	Yes	Yes	No, which can impact your safety if you have an emergency
Cost	Most carriers charge \$10/day. Good value for short term with full functionality and safety	Cost varies by GB of data purchased. Ok for short trips to other countries, but not for long term everyday use	Best value for long term and has full functionality and safety

Cell Phones

Encourage your friends and family to download any of the following apps so they can text, call, and video call you for free while abroad! **(Most recommended: WhatsApp)**

WhatsApp		Zoom	
Facebook Messenger		Skype	
Facetime (iPhone to iPhone)		Google Voice	
Instagram Messages		Libon	
Viber		WeChat	

HELPFUL TIP

To see if your phone/device supports eSIM, go to this [link](#).

What is an eSIM?

It's probably best to let the pros explain it:

[Apple](#)

[Android](#)

WARNING! Phones are a theft risk! Don't walk down the street texting, have your phone out in plain sight on the subway, or leave it on the table at a bar/restaurant.

One final comment on options: "Spain Connect" cell phone option offered by Connectivity Global Services, is a cell phone option for students studying in Spain.

Please review information about this option [here](#).



Students are encouraged to save all contacts and phone contents to a hard drive or cloud storage folder before departure.

Please note: All information provided regarding cell phones is for information only. ASA does not manage plans and cannot provide customer support.

Apps

Please download these apps to your phone before departure!

WhatsApp	MANDATORY Free texting and calling to any phone number in the world, as long as your phone is connected to WiFi or data	
CISI Traveler	MANDATORY Medical Insurance	
Smart Traveler	MANDATORY US State Department: STEP: Smart Traveler Enrollment Program	
XE Currency	Real-time exchange rates	
Safeture*	MANDATORY Real-time safety and security updates	
The app for each airline you are flying	Best way to get updates on delays, cancellations, gate changes, etc.	Varies

* ASA provides you with a subscription to Safeture to help keep you informed about safety and potential issues (demonstrations, natural events/disasters, etc.) while abroad. Wait to download this until you get the go-ahead from ASA about 7-14 days before your program starts (we will give you our subscription code).

Psst...Here's a few more helpful apps to help you make more informed and safe decisions before you leave and while you're away:

- Rome2Rio: A multi-modal transportation search platform that helps you plan both local and long-distance travel abroad
- Hopper: Using a predictive algorithm for future prices, Hopper can notify you when it's the best time to book
- Skyscanner: Helps you book international flights quickly and easily
- Google Maps: Can download and view maps offline and safe on international data or roaming
- Smart Traveler: Designed by the US State Department, helpful tool for every US citizen provides travel warnings and alerts; Enroll in Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)
- Jet Lag App: Uses the latest research on sleep and circadian neuroscience to advise you making small adjustments based on your itinerary's timezones
- Duolingo: Can help you learn a language before you depart
- Google Translate: You can type, talk or even take a picture and it will translate instantly
- Oanda Currency Converter: Helps you accurately plan your budget and current exchange rates

ASA does not endorse any of the external organizations or services; they are provided only to serve as informational aides.

Safety

The best safety tip we can give you is: Be aware of where you are, where your belongings are, and what is going on around you at all times.

Remember that alcohol will impair your awareness and judgment.

Always remember that you are in a CITY.

It is easy to feel you are immune to danger, but when you let your guard down too far, you can become a target.



Pickpocketing

- On the street, the main technique pickpockets use is **distraction**.
 - They may spill food/drink on your clothing, ask you for directions, show you a map, try to shine your shoes, hand you a flower or some herbs, or read your palm to divert your attention from their accomplice who is stealing from you.
- On the subway/bus or in any large crowd, the most popular technique is the **"crush and grab"**.
 - While they are pushing up against you, they might be picking your pockets. Another trick is to wait for the train/bus to stop, grab the purse/backpack, and hop off just as the doors are closing.
 - Also be mindful of **"the grab"** technique, when a thief will snatch your purse/backpack that you have left sitting on the floor or hanging on the back of your chair.
- In a crowded bar or club, a popular technique is to **weave through the crowd**, lifting wallets along the way while people are distracted.
 - The best way to avoid this is to carry your money in a money belt, or keep your wallet in your front pocket, or carry a small cross-body purse that you can keep under your arm or against your body at all times.

HELPFUL TIPS

- Any time someone offers you "free" flowers, herbs, a bracelet, or a palm reading, **WALK AWAY!** It is always a scam, even if they insist that it's free.
- Be **SUPER careful** if you are approached by a stranger while using an ATM machine! **Take out cash during the day when people are around, and bring a friend to be your "lookout."**
- While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws! Laws may not be the same as in the US and as a foreigner, you may not have the same protections under the law.



Alcohol & Drugs

- You will be held responsible for your behavior, whether it is a result of alcohol or otherwise.
- ALWAYS DRINK IN MODERATION.**
- Never accept a drink from a stranger!
- Never leave a bar or club with someone you have just met.
- Avoid alcohol if you take any medications, as alcohol can interact with certain medications.
- REMEMBER:** drunkenness is frowned upon many cultures.
- Drug use of ANY kind and inappropriate alcohol use are strictly prohibited under the ASA Code of Conduct. Violation of the Code of Conduct may result in expulsion from your housing and/or from the ASA program, with no refund or academic credits.

Safety Do's and Don'ts



Do

Do contact your parents to let them know you arrived safely!
They will worry until they hear from you!



Don't

Don't leave your belongings in the care of new "friends" you have just made - Students have been robbed this way.

Do use ATM machines during daylight hours. If possible, use an ATM inside a bank and bring a friend to be your lookout.

Don't use ATM machines inside a convenience store – they are more likely to be tampered with than bank ATMs. ATM tampering can result in your card number getting stolen.

Do put your money safely away and zip up your purse/backpack BEFORE leaving a cash register or ATM.

Don't leave your purse or backpack hanging on the back of your chair or sitting on the floor at a bar or restaurant- this makes it very easy for someone to take it without you noticing.

Do use a cross-body purse or bag. This makes it harder for someone to steal your purse/bag.

Don't carry valuable items (e.g. wallet, passport, money, phone) in your pants/coat pocket or in the outside pocket of your backpack/purse.

Do keep your backpack/purse fully zipped AT ALL TIMES. Wear it on the front of your body.

Don't ever leave your belongings unattended in a public place.

Do carry your money, credit cards, passport, etc. in a money belt whenever you're traveling.

Don't make yourself a target—try to dress like the locals. Don't wear expensive handbags or jewelry. Leave these at home!

Do make sure that all doors and windows are closed and locked when staying in a hotel.

Don't answer the door at your apartment or hotel room without verifying who it is.

Do lock your valuables inside your suitcase when not in use (passport, camera, extra cash, etc.). If you're staying in a hotel and your room has a safe, use it!

Don't consult your map or travel book on the street—duck into a restaurant or business.

Do ask your ASA Site Director or a cab company recommendation. If traveling, ask your hotel.

Don't go out in large groups (6+), especially if you're speaking English, as this will draw unwanted attention.

Do lock your apartment door AT ALL TIMES, even while you are at home!!

Don't carry large amounts of cash. If you withdraw a large amount, head straight home and lock excess cash in your suitcase, then take it out as needed.

Safety Do's and Don'ts



Do

Do be cautious when approached by any stranger – even if they seem harmless or trying to help you.



Don't

Don't go to unfamiliar places or neighborhoods alone, especially at night.

Do watch out for each other. Don't let a friend walk home alone or leave the bar by themselves.

Don't accept a drink from a stranger or leave your drink unattended.

Do program important phone numbers into your phone: Police, Fire, ASA Site Director, U.S. Embassy, Taxi.

Don't let the front door of your apartment building swing shut. Always turn around and make sure the door shuts and locks behind you.

Do take a taxi home after 10 pm. Spending that small amount of extra money is worth it to be safe!

Don't let someone you just met walk you home. Don't accept a ride from someone you just met. Don't invite someone you just met back to your apartment, hotel room, dorm, etc!

Do report the loss or theft of your passport immediately by contacting the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy.

Don't ride the subway alone after dark. If you will be taking the subway after dark, try to travel in groups of 3-4 people and avoid eye contact with strangers.

Do memorize your local address and new phone number (if you get a new SIM card after arrival).

Don't be loud and/or intoxicated in public. It will only draw negative attention to yourself and label you as a foreigner. In fact, public intoxication is offensive to some local people.

Do keep your phone battery charged at all times! Carry a (charged) external battery with you.

DON'T ATTEND DEMONSTRATIONS, STRIKES, OR OTHER POLITICAL OR CONTROVERSIAL GATHERINGS UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE. As a foreigner, it may be illegal for you to do so and you can be arrested and deported.

Do be respectful of the local government and/or monarchy. Many countries still observe *lèse majesté* laws, making it a criminal offense to insult or disparage the reigning sovereign or state, including online.

Don't go out alone after dark, don't walk home alone at night, don't leave a bar/club by yourself, don't let a friend leave by themselves, and don't leave a friend behind alone, even if they insist!



Watch this short video for more
safety do's and don'ts

Safety for Women

Most women travel safely around the world each year without incident. However, when it comes to health and security, in some places women travelers may face additional risk. Be mindful of local conditions and culture, especially if you are traveling alone, and contact the American Citizens Services unit at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate with concerns related to your safety and security.

Be Mindful of Local Customs and Norms

Customs and norms in other countries can be quite different from those in the United States. Some countries prohibit specific behaviors, ways of dressing, or specific speech. Be sure to know this information before traveling to your destination. Cultural differences might be reflected in expectations about women's clothing and appearance. For example, tight-fitting clothes, sleeveless shirts, and shorts worn in western countries might be regarded as unacceptable in countries observing more conservative cultural and religious practices. Pack essential items that will allow you to blend in locally.

Freedom of Speech

Some countries have legally guaranteed rights related to freedom of speech and protesting, while other countries have laws which severely curtail speech. Some countries, in particular, might curtail or prohibit altogether speech and public protests related to advocating for women's rights. Understand that openly critical remarks including comments on messaging and social media apps, could lead to unintended negative actions such as fines or arrest.

Travel Accommodations

- Research accommodations carefully, read reviews for safety concerns; have backup accommodations
- Arrange your first night of accommodation before you travel, and the entirety of your accommodation if possible. You are more likely to be vulnerable when you first land in a country with unfamiliar surroundings
- When registering, using your first initial and no title (don't use "Mrs., Ms., or Miss.")
- Do not tell strangers where you are staying

Be Aware of Your Surroundings

- Avoid carrying or wearing anything overtly expensive to deter theft
- If you do find yourself in an unsafe situation, be loud and draw attention to yourself to deter unwanted actions/attention. Being safe is more important than being polite.
- Use facial expressions, body language, and a firm voice to fend off any unwanted attention.
- Think pro-actively about a safety plan if you find yourself in an unsafe situation. Consider bringing personal safety whistles/alarms and taking self-defense courses.

Safety for LGBTQI+

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) travelers can face unique challenges when traveling abroad. Laws and attitudes in some countries may affect safety and ease of travel. Legal protections vary from country to country. Many countries do not legally recognize same-sex marriage. Approximately seventy countries consider consensual same-sex sexual relations a crime, sometimes carrying severe punishment.

Here are some pointers for staying safe while abroad:

- Remember you are subject to the laws of the country where you travel. In many countries, consensual same-sex sexual activity, public gathering, or dissemination of pro-LGBTQI+ material—among other things relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics—may be illegal. Read the country information for your destination for more details
- Be cautious of potentially risky situations
- Watch out for entrapment campaigns. Police in some countries monitor websites, mobile apps, or meeting places, so be cautious connecting with the local community
- Be wary of new-found “friends.” Criminals may target or attempt to extort LGBTQI+ foreigners
- Some resorts or LGBTQI+ neighborhoods can be quite segregated. Be aware attitudes in surrounding areas can be much less accepting

Travel Resources for LGBTQI+

- TSA [Transgender Passenger](#) information
- [Traveler's Checklist](#)
- [IGLTA](#), the International Gay/Lesbian Travel Association
- [International Lesbian and Gay Association](#)
- [Equaldex](#) collaborative LGBT knowledge base
- The [Trevor Project](#) is a private organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQI+ young people ages 13-24.
- [National Center for Transgender Equality](#) travel page.



Travel Tips

DO NOT BOOK ANY PERSONAL TRAVEL OR FAMILY/FRIEND VISITS UNTIL AFTER YOU ARRIVE IN COUNTRY AND CONFIRM YOUR SCHEDULE FOR THE SEMESTER.

FAILURE TO HEED THIS ADVICE MAY RESULT IN MISSED EXCURSIONS, ORIENTATION, CLASSES, EXAMS, OR OTHER IMPORTANT AND NON-REFUNDABLE ACTIVITIES.

Dates for these events are sometimes not confirmed until after arrival.

Travel plans DO NOT justify an absence from class.

Travel plans DO NOT result in a refund for missed excursions.

Another good reason to make travel plans after you arrive is that you may make new friends you'll want to travel with!

HELPFUL TIPS

Occasionally, students need their luggage stored in different cities while traveling. We recommend the following apps/websites:

1. [LuggageHero](#)
2. [Vertoe](#)
3. [Bounce](#)

- If you plan to travel, consider getting a guidebook such as Let's Go, Lonely Planet, Frommer's, or the Berkeley Guide. These guides are often written by students and backpackers who like you, are on a budget. A guidebook will give you ideas for places to visit and details on transportation, lodging, places to eat, and much more. You can also ask your ASA Site Director for recommendations.
- You must research the entry/visa requirements for ALL countries that you plan to visit. The [U.S. Department of State](#) website is a great place to start. It has info about entry requirements, as well as travel advisories.

Keep in mind...

- Outside the USA, DATES are often written differently (DD-MM-YY instead of MM-DD-YY). EX: Instead of 12/1/23 for December 1st, 2023, they may write 1/12/23. Before purchasing any train or plane ticket, carefully check the date first!
- Outside the USA, TIMES are often listed in 24-hour time (military time). EX: 7:00 will mean 7am, NOT 7pm! 7pm may be listed as 19:00. Always double check the times carefully before purchasing any train or plane ticket!
- Luggage limits are super strict on budget airlines like RyanAir. Watch out for "hidden fees" like charging you for a carry-on or seat assignment.
- It is **mandatory** to let your ASA Site Director know about any trips you're going on and when you expect to be back. In addition, make sure your parents or another trusted person has a copy of your travel itinerary and a number where you can be reached.
- While in a foreign country you are subject to its laws, and you may not be afforded the same rights and protections as you have in the US!
- If you plan to travel before or after your program, we strongly recommend you purchase international medical insurance to cover the duration of your travels. ASA's insurance covers you only during your actual program dates.
- Try not to arrive in unfamiliar towns/cities at night. Always make lodging arrangements in advance.
- When traveling in a group, you'll find that different people will want to see different things. Always make a rendezvous point so if anyone gets lost, you'll know when and where to find the group.
- Never leave your belongings, especially your money, passport, or phone, in the care of new "friends" you have met on the train, plane, bus, or hostel!
- Don't drink or brush your teeth with the water on trains or planes. It's not potable!
- If you suffer from motion sickness, take Dramamine ½ hour before your journey begins.

Dietary Restrictions Abroad

One of the more memorable and enjoyable experiences for students who study abroad is the ability to discover a diverse and unique array of food. For students with dietary restrictions based on health, lifestyle, or religion, mindful planning and preparation can allow you to engage in these same experiences. One of the biggest things you should be aware of before going abroad is that all countries refer to dietary restrictions in a different way. It is very possible that you will experience miscommunication with locals regarding your diet during your time abroad. One way to help minimize these incidents is to research your host country in advance and learn how to express yourself according to their culture and language. Translation cards (see below) can help with this and are a great resource for interactions with host families, restaurants, street food vendors, and more. These are especially useful if you are not familiar with the language of your host country.

Below are some resources to help you prepare. You can also speak with your ASA Site Director to see if there are any options available for your special needs including special markets, or special goods, once in your host city.

Gain a basic understanding of the language

Develop a basic understanding of the language in order to communicate your needs with local hosts and avoid an emergency. You should be able to explain what you cannot eat and ask about the ingredients in a dish. Note that not all cultures have an understanding of food allergies, dietary restrictions, or vegetarianism/veganism; you are your own best advocate.

Learn how to say words and phrases such as "vegetarian," "kosher," "I don't eat meat (cheese, wheat, etc)", or "I'm allergic to (nuts, dairy, etc)" in the local language so as to not cause confusion or disappointment in public restaurants.

If you are unsure about ingredients, having a note (or allergy translation card – see below) in the local language to explain important information about your dietary restrictions can help. Create a card you can keep in your wallet, or on your phone, that explains not only what you cannot eat but also the degree of severity if consumed to help food service employees know how to advise you.

Know the difference in the language between "I can't eat X" and "I won't eat X" to avoid miscommunication. Be sure to check translations for accuracy with someone who speaks the language locally. You may be met with confusion, so be ready to explain what you mean.

Use the Google Translate Photo Feature

If you haven't yet memorized the food vocab of your host country or you are traveling elsewhere, the Google Translate app is a useful tool. This suggestion may seem painfully obvious, but many people are unaware of the camera feature on the app. This feature allows you to hold your camera up to any labels, menus, signs, etc. and the app will automatically translate whatever you are trying to read into English.

Dietary Restrictions Abroad

Always have snacks that comply with your needs

Because it never hurts to over-prepare when traveling with a health condition or a dietary concern, err on the side of caution by packing a few snacks that you know you can comfortably eat.

Keep a supply of medication with you at all times

It may seem obvious that someone with food allergies or digestive issues should have a ready supply of medications on-hand, but when you're traveling in an unfamiliar place, you'll want to keep those meds directly on your person (rather than in a suitcase at your apartment). Make sure you travel with your EpiPen, Benadryl or other medications you require, in case you accidentally come in contact with allergens. Keep your medications in their original packaging and never store them in your checked bag when flying. You want to have access to them at all times in case of emergency.

HELPFUL TIPS

Diet-specific websites:

[HappyCow](#)

[Vegetarian Resource Group](#)

[Zabihah.com](#)

[Kashrut.com](#)

[Spokin App and Guides](#)

HELPFUL TIPS

Allergy Translation Card* websites:

(*fees may apply)

[Gluten free translation cards](#)

[Gluten Free Travelers](#)

[Vegan Translation Cards](#)

[Allergy Translation Cards](#)

[Food & Drug Allergy, Special Diets](#)

Helpful Articles

There are many helpful and specific articles on the Internet such as "a gluten free guide to Rome" or "living in Madrid with a nut allergy." Students should simply google their restriction and the city they're going to, like "gluten free Paris" or "vegan Amsterdam" and they're bound to find articles and advice from other travelers.

Here are a few to get you started:

- [6 Tips for Managing Dietary Restrictions While Abroad](#)
- [Survival Kit: Studying Abroad with a Food Allergy](#)
- [5 Tips for Traveling as a Vegetarian](#)
- [Travelling with Lactose Intolerance](#)

Adjusting to life abroad: Culture Shock

The phenomenon of “culture shock” has been experienced to varying degrees by almost every traveler who spends an extended period of time outside of their own country, including virtually all study abroad students. The difficulties and challenges that lead to culture shock are very real. The climate change, the unfamiliar food, different business methods, different concepts of time, and the language barrier can all result in a feeling of isolation.

Immunity to culture shock does not come from being open minded, although this may help you adjust more quickly. Individuals differ greatly in the degree to which culture shock affects them, and luckily, few people will be unable to make the necessary adjustments. Some people get by with very few, if any, adjustments. However, the majority of students go through a common series of distinct stages as they adjust and adapt to a different culture. Eventually, if you adapt to the environment and change your attitude, you'll be able to get the most out of their experience!

What can be most frightening about a study or travel abroad experience is that the student's self-esteem and security may be threatened. But, with time, most students do adjust and see the experience as the great opportunity that it is. It is important to realize that the feelings you are experiencing are normal and will eventually subside. In doing so, you will be better able to adjust and will come away from the experience with a greater understanding of culture and, most importantly, yourself.

Please note: Students often feel physically sick at first when overseas. This is due to the climate change, jet lag, etc. This feeling usually does not last more than a few days. Rest assured that you will recuperate, and don't hesitate to seek support from ASA!

Symptoms of Culture Shock

- Sadness, loneliness, melancholy, homesickness
- Aches, pains, allergies or other physical illness
- Insomnia, desire to sleep too much or too little
- Changes in temperament, depression, feeling vulnerable or powerless
- Anger, irritability, resentment, unwillingness to interact with others
- Identifying with your home culture or idealizing your home country
- Trying too hard to absorb everything in the new culture or country
- Unable to solve simple problems
- Feelings of inadequacy or insecurity
- Developing stereotypes about the new culture
- Developing obsessions such as over-cleanliness
- Longing for family
- Feelings of being lost, overlooked, exploited or abused

Watch this [short video](#) about Culture Shock



Watch this [video](#) about being receptive to new cultures

Stages of Culture Shock

Excitement

- Feel very positive about the culture
- Are overwhelmed with impressions, possibly feelings of euphoria
- Find the new culture exotic and are fascinated
- Are passive, meaning they have little experience of the culture

Withdrawal

- Find the behavior of the local people unusual and unpredictable
- Small problems or annoyances seem insurmountable
- Begin to dislike the culture and react negatively to the behavior
- Feelings of anxiety
- Start to withdraw
- Begin to criticize, mock or show animosity to the local people
- Frustrations with the country may be based on stereotypes

Adjustment

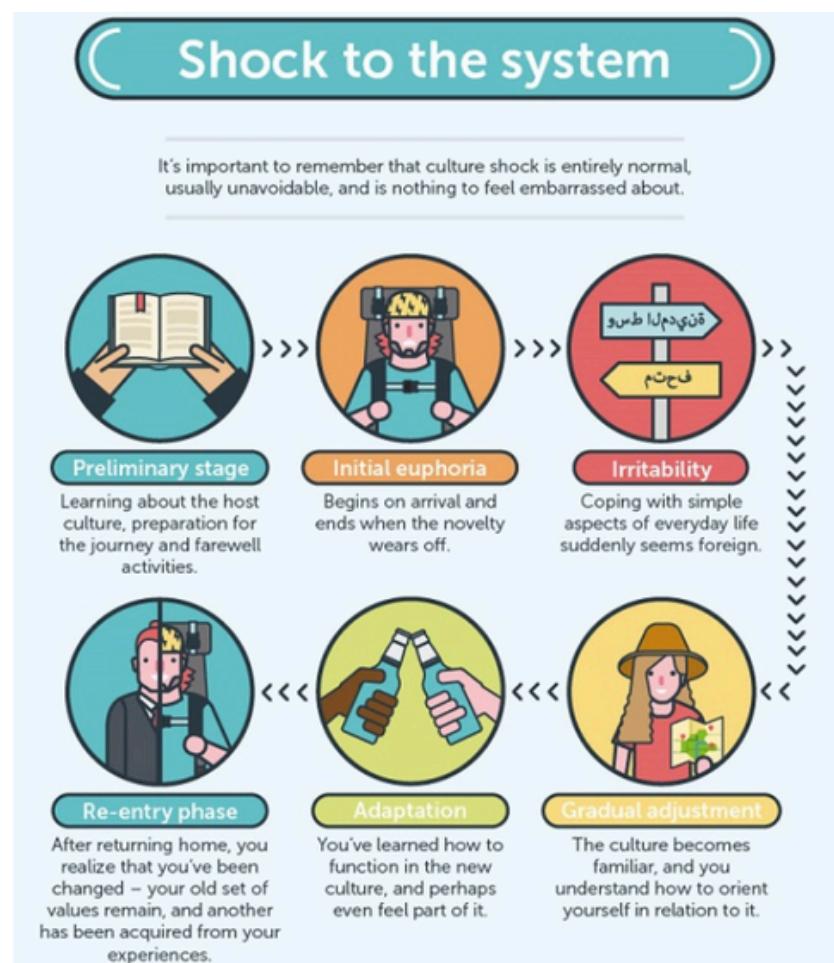
- Begin to understand the local language better so feelings of isolation lessen
- Understand and accept the behavior of the people
- Realization that the situation may be difficult, but it's not hopeless
- Regain your sense of humor

Adaptation

- Enjoy being in the culture
- Functions well in the culture
- Prefer certain cultural traits of the new culture rather than their own
- Adopt certain behaviors from the new culture
- Feel you're an authority on the host country; you may share your knowledge of country with others in a knowing fashion

Re-Entry to Home Country

- Frustrations with home country
- Reverse Culture Shock



How to Cope with Culture Shock

- First and foremost, don't hesitate to seek support from ASA!
- Never confuse your ability to speak the new language with your intelligence; it is easy to get down on yourself when you don't understand the language, but there's no reason to. It takes everyone time to adjust and become comfortable with a new language.
- Establish simple goals and evaluate your progress
- Develop a hobby.
- Don't forget the good things you already have!
- Remember, there are always resources that you can use.
- Learn to be constructive. If you encounter an unfavorable environment, don't put yourself in that position again. Be easy on yourself.
- Include a regular form of physical activity in your routine. This will help combat depression. Exercise, run, walk, swim, take an aerobics class, etc.
- Relaxation and meditation are proven to be very positive for people who are experiencing periods of stress.
- Maintain contact with the new culture. Make an effort to learn the language. Volunteer in community activities that allow you to practice the language that you are learning. This will help you feel less stress about language and useful at the same time.
- Take advantage of services that your university, church or community offer.
- Allow yourself to feel sad about the things that you have left behind: your family, your friends, etc.
- Find ways to live with the things that don't satisfy you 100%.
- Maintain confidence in yourself and continue your plans for the future.

HELPFUL TIPS

Check out this helpful [article](#) on how other travelers dealt with Culture Shock.

Resources for Diverse Students

ASA is committed to diversifying education abroad. In keeping with the values of diversity, equity and inclusion, we want to help all students, from the broadest range of backgrounds, have the opportunity to study abroad.

ASA's website has a [page with resources](#) for study abroad students from diverse backgrounds.

Here, you'll find weblinks, videos, and articles with support resources and information for:

First Generation College students
Racially and Ethnically Diverse students
LGBTQI+ students
Students with High Financial Need
Students with Mental Health concerns
Students with Disabilities
Religious and Spiritual Diversity

Additionally, we encourage you to check out [Diversity Abroad](#). Their mission is to create equitable access to the benefits of global education by empowering educators, engaging stakeholders, and connecting diverse students to resources and opportunity. Their resources page is chock full of fantastic [articles](#), written by POC, members of the LGBTQI+ community and folks with various perspectives.

Black & Curly Haircare Abroad

We recommend you bring your favorite haircare products with you and enough to last your program, in case you can't find your favorites abroad. While products are available abroad, you may not find the same brands, variety, and ease of accessibility. This blog has suggestions for products to bring (<https://sojournies.com/black-hair-abroad-tips-packing-list/>) and haircare tools to bring (<https://sojournies.com/traveling-with-natural-hair/>).

Additional tips can be found in the Diversity Abroad Guide to Managing Black Hair Abroad at: <https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/managing-black-hair-abroad>

If you're going to London, you'll find that Black & curly hair salons, barbershops, and products are widely available. ASA's website also has some local recommendations by city – go to www.academicstudies.com, navigate to Program Locations, and click on a city.

Resources for LGBTQIA+ Students

Since every person's study abroad experience is unique and personal, and since attitudes toward the LGBTQIA+ community vary from country to country, it will remain to be seen exactly what issues you encounter, if any, in your host country and city as an LGBTQIA+ student.

Compared to the USA, some countries have more progressive laws and more open social attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ rights and community. Students in more open countries may discover a new sense of freedom to express oneself, and possibly have a difficult transition coming home to the US where attitudes could seem restrictive in comparison to their host country.

On the other hand, there are many countries that restrict and/or prohibit LGBTQIA+ identification and have negative social attitudes toward it. Students in more restrictive countries may find that open expression of sexuality and gender may not be tolerated, and you may feel as though freedoms in the USA have suddenly been taken away from you. Of course, it is impossible to characterize a complex cultural and personal experience in such simple terms, so know that your feelings and perceptions before, during, and after your study abroad experience may vary.

It is important to stay true to yourself while abroad, but also keep in mind that once you are outside of the USA, you are required to follow the laws of your host country and USA laws no longer protect you. **All of ASA's host countries are tolerant of LGBTQ+ rights.** However, it is important to read about the laws and local attitudes of your host country – AND any other countries you plan to travel to – before you leave. Also, once you arrive in your host city, you should observe the local culture and stay up-to-date on local current events to adapt to your new environment.

Gender Pronouns & Foreign Languages

If a foreign language is spoken in your host country, please be aware that from a grammatical perspective, the local language may leave less flexibility than English for expression of non-binary terms. This may take some getting used to and require patience and understanding on your part. For example, Spanish, French, Italian, and German grammar give pronouns, people, and objects a gender. This means articulating your English language pronouns may be tricky in the local language. Be prepared that people are going to make mistakes with pronouns, especially if their grammatically gendered native language makes it complicated. You can manage this by practicing patience, reminding people politely, and knowing that languages are slowly changing to be more inclusive. To learn more about how gendered languages accommodate for non-binary terms and how languages are evolving, check out [this article](#).

Lists of Non-binary Gender Pronouns & Grammar Tips

Click the language to view: [French](#) [German](#) [Italian](#) [Spanish](#)

- [LGBT Rights by Country or territory](#)
- [Gay Rights Organizations around the World](#)
- [International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association](#)
- [OutRight Action International](#)
- [GoAbroad LGBTQ+ Travel Guide](#)
- [International LGBTQ+ Travel Association](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Study Abroad Resources](#)
- [Maps of Anti-LGBTQ+ Laws](#)

Please do not hesitate to speak with ASA if you have any questions or concerns.
ASA strives to provide a safe and supportive environment for all our students!



Mental Health & Self-Care

As you prepare for your semester abroad, it's normal to feel nervous or anxious. You may think you're the only one feeling that way, but trust us, you're not!

Being away from home and adjusting to a different country can cause feelings of anxiety and disconnection for some students. This is also normal – but it's manageable! In this section, you will find tips concerning mental health and self-care during your study abroad program.

For students who have a history of anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns, your symptoms can be heightened. This section will tell you the steps you should take before departure and after arrival to help ease your transition and ensure a successful semester.

Even students without a history of anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns may find that studying abroad can cause feelings of anxiety and emotional discomfort. This section will help you know what to watch out for and how to cope with it, if it happens.

Common Stressors:

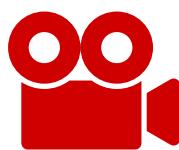
- Being in an unfamiliar environment where you don't speak the language
- Being away from your support system
- Not sleeping in your own bed or eating the same food you're used to
- The stress of travel and jet lag can cause heightened temporary anxiety

As a result of these stressors, it is NORMAL to experience some challenging feelings, such as:

- Feeling disconnected, isolated, lonely, out of place
- Feeling anxious, depressed or even panicked
- Feeling homesick or FOMO

If you live with anxiety or depression, please consider taking these steps before you leave and after you arrive, to help you manage your symptoms and have a successful study abroad experience:

- If you already see a therapist, be sure to discuss your study abroad plans with them. Your therapist can help you formulate a plan. This may include increasing your medication during the first few weeks of your program or scheduling extra therapy sessions leading up to your departure. If your therapist offers Skype or Facetime sessions, we strongly recommend you schedule some sessions during your first few weeks abroad, and throughout your program if you and your therapist feel that would be helpful.
- If you take any medications, talk to your prescriber as soon as possible to find out if you can bring enough medication with you to last your entire program. Not all medications are available outside the US, so it is strongly recommended you bring enough to last the full duration of your program. If you find that you can't bring enough medication, please contact ASA as soon as possible so we can help you find out if your medication is available abroad.



Watch this short [video](#) about Mental Health

Watch this short [video](#) about Self-Care

Watch this short [video](#) about FOMO

Mental Health & Self-Care

ASA includes a paid subscription to [mindhamok](#) for every UK/Europe semester and summer program participant. [mindhamok](#) is a 24-7 service designed to support study abroad students' mental, physical and social wellbeing throughout their journey - both when it's good and not so good. [mindhamok](#)'s curated online and live resources give ASA students many tools to succeed throughout their term abroad and on to the rest of their lives.

ASA students can use [mindhamok](#) to:

- Request an appointment with a coach/counselor
- Live chat with a coach/counselor about concerns such as roommate issues, relationships, etc.
- Discuss homesickness, culture shock, or adjustment concerns
- Access online Gen Z-centered content to help them understand common study abroad topics, such as: culture shock; how to maintain physical wellbeing while overseas; equity, diversity and inclusion as a study abroad student; networking events; how to switch off and enjoy experiences without social media; relationships while abroad; safe socializing; and a host of other important topics.

Prior to departure, students attend a [mindhamok](#) orientation which outlines their services and provides students with opportunities to ask questions about health and safety, culture questions, or anything on their minds. Once abroad, students meet and work with ASA Site Directors, trained student services professionals, who complement the [mindhamok](#) pre-departure meeting with an in-person, city-specific orientation outlining in-country safety, emergency contacts and resources, culture, transportation, accommodation and utilities use, academic regulations and differences, as well as hospital and pharmacy locations in their city. ASA Site Directors are available to provide in-person support for many things students may encounter while overseas and may refer students to [mindhamok](#) for additional support as necessary.

Students studying in Latin America are provided a paid subscription to CISI's Remote Behavioral and Mental Health Services. These telephonic consultations happen between a U.S. mental health professional and the student, at no additional expense, for the purposes of delivering counseling services.

This service can help:

- Mitigate emergencies through accessible psychological care administered by U.S. based specialists
- Immediate crisis intervention
- Early intervention
- Psychology assessment
- Follow up

Mental Health & Self-Care

Self-care can help you maintain mental and physical wellness while abroad!

Here are some self-care tips:

- To lessen jet lag, don't drink alcohol on the plane, stay hydrated, and avoid long naps the day you arrive. Staying awake on your first day and going to sleep at a normal bedtime is the best way to get in sync with the local time zone. As tempting as it may be to stay out late, you will feel infinitely better the next day if you get a good night's sleep on your first night. The first week of the program is often the most demanding, so rest up!
- After you arrive, if you feel nervous, panicky, or wanting to get back on the plane and go home, please know that the cause is usually anxiety or culture shock, and it's treatable. Talk to your ASA Site Director right away if you experience this, and we can help you get the support you need.
- While it is important to stay in touch with family and friends at home, having too much contact during the first couple weeks can actually be counterproductive to the adjustment process. We recommend you schedule just a couple phone calls or Facetimes during your first week or two. It is important to focus your energy on learning about your new city and making connections with others in your program, and not on what you're missing out on at home. It will still be there when you get back!
- After the initial excitement has subsided, you will enter an adjustment period. Students experience this to varying degrees – some a lot and some not so much. But during the adjustment phase you may experience feelings of homesickness, disconnection, loneliness, or even depression. This is a normal part of the adjustment process for many students and usually subsides within a matter of days or weeks. One thing past students have done when they were feeling homesick or overwhelmed was to "take a day off" from being a study abroad student and from the pressure students often put on themselves to be seeing and doing new things all of the time. If you feel like staying in and watching Netflix for a day, that is absolutely fine. It's ok to take a day off and try again the next day!
- If you are struggling during your program or if you have persistent homesickness, loneliness, or depression, please let your ASA Site Director know. Your Site Director is a safe person to listen and support you and is available anytime during your program. They can also refer you to a professional counselor if you would like one. It is covered by your international medical insurance.
- If you exercise regularly at home, consider continuing this while abroad. If your host institution doesn't have a gym, your ASA Site Director can suggest one to join.
- Additional ways to cope with homesickness are to maintain a daily routine and get involved in the local community. Maintaining a daily routine gives you structure that can help you get through the adjustment phase. Your ASA Site Director can offer you suggestions for getting involved in the local community. This can help you expand your social circle, stay busy, and gain access to the local culture.
- Finally, meditation, mindfulness, and journaling are valuable sources of stress relief. If you are not experienced with meditation and mindfulness, consider downloading an app to your phone that offers guided meditation.

SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

- Good sleep 
- Meditate 
- Exercise 
- Read book 
- Eat healthy 
- Drink more water 



Watch this short [video](#) about coping with Jet lag!

Classes, Grades & Transcripts

Make sure you understand your host institution's attendance policy. Absences may not be excused for reasons you believe to be valid, and even if the reasons may be considered valid at your home institution. You will be subject to YOUR HOST INSTITUTION'S attendance policies, not the attendance policy of your home institution. Please be aware that religious holidays for which absence is excused at your home institution, may not qualify for an excused absence at your host institution.

HELPFUL TIP

If you need academic accommodations, please let ASA know right away. We will need to submit your documentation to your host institution before your program begins.

About 6-12 weeks after your program end date, your host institution will send your final transcript/grades directly to ASA. This is normal processing time for foreign universities. Compared to US universities, foreign universities always take MUCH longer to issue final grades and transcripts. Unfortunately, ASA has no control over transcript processing times.

ASA will send your final transcript to your home institution as soon as we receive it. At that point your home institution will begin the process of transferring in your classes, grades, and credits, which can take several weeks. Our home institution will determine what classes you receive credit for, and how many credits.

- If you have an outstanding balance due to ASA, your transcript will not be released until you have met all your financial obligations.

We will email you an unofficial PDF copy so you can see your grades.

Your final transcript WILL have grades. It is NOT possible for your host institution to award pass/fail grades. Most US colleges and universities will only award transfer credit if you earn a grade of "C" or higher; however, this varies by school. Some schools transfer in study abroad grades as pass/fail; other schools transfer in the actual grades, which will then be calculated in your GPA. Check with your school's Registrar or Study Abroad Office so you are clear on your school's policy. Make sure you understand the minimum grade necessary to receive transfer credit, and make sure you understand whether your final grades will be calculated in your GPA or not.

As a final reminder, if you want to get credit for all the coursework you complete abroad, you must have all your classes approved by your home institution before you depart.

Preparing to Return to the US

- See “Preparing for Travel” section earlier in this guide for ESSENTIAL travel to-do list and steps before crossing borders!
- **Expect more screening at the US border than in the past.** Be prepared for US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers to search your personal belongings, **including bags, cell phones, laptops, and tablets.** Review the following **ACLU article** for tips on handling this situation: <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/what-do-when-encountering-law-enforcement-airports-and-other-ports-entry-us>
- **If you’re a dual citizen of the US and another country and you used your non-US passport to enter your host country,** bring both passports with you when you return to the US, as well as a photocopy of your outbound flight itinerary when you embarked on your study abroad program and your study abroad acceptance letter from your home institution (obtain this from your home institution’s study abroad office).
- **If you’re an international student in the US:** Ensure your US visa and I-20/DS-2019 are valid and permit re-entry. Contact the International Office at your home institution at least 3 weeks prior to returning to the US to find out what steps you need to complete or info you need to be aware of, in order to return back to the US crossing over the US border. Confirm with your them that the travel signature on your I-20/DS-2019 is up to date for your return to the US. Ask them if they have an emergency number you can call if having difficulty at a US port of entry. If yes, write that on a piece of paper along with your other emergency contacts, and carry it with you (in case your phone is detained, lost, or battery dies). Finally, be sure to get a copy of your updated I-94.

Reverse Culture Shock

Regardless of the length of time you were abroad, you'll undoubtedly experience some differences in self, family and friends, and surroundings. Life at home has moved on, and you have moved on as well, but in a different way. You may have had expectations about returning home that were not met. All of these changes can result in feeling a little out of place at home, as if you are a stranger in a familiar land. This is normal and is called "reverse culture shock." It may be counterintuitive to think that you could experience a difficult transition when returning home. But re-entry, or reverse culture shock, is actually a very common reaction to returning home from studying abroad.

Reactions to Re-entry

- Restlessness
- Boredom
- Depression
- Uncertainty, confusion
- Isolation, wanting to be alone
- Reverse homesickness: Missing people, places, attitudes or lifestyle of the host country
- Changes in goals and priorities
- Negative or intolerance towards the USA, including American behavior, attitudes, customs and common social practices



It is much like the culture shock that you may have experienced when you first went abroad. Similar to having to adjust when arriving in another country, you must make some adjustments coming home, too. The coping skills and strategies that were successful in adjusting to your host culture will be just as helpful coming home.

Reverse Culture Shock Stages

- Disengagement with host country and culture
 - You start focusing on your return home and begin thinking about wrapping up your study abroad experience
- Euphoria
 - You get excited to return home to familiar people, pets, foods, etc.
- Dampened Euphoria
 - You start to feel like a "foreigner" in your home country; frustration, critical of home
- Gradual Readjustment
 - You begin to analyze what you learned and decide how you will use it at home

Reverse Culture Shock

Suggestions for how to cope with Reverse Culture Shock

- Get involved with international students on your home campus. You have learned first-hand that it can be challenging to adjust to living in another country and make new friends. Take the opportunity to help international students feel more welcome. You can offer to assist with arrival and orientation for the incoming international students on your campus or join international student groups.
- Offer to help with pre-departure orientations and Study Abroad Fairs for future students. Sharing your experience with others will be gratifying for you and valuable for students who are about to embark on a study abroad experience.
- Attend a Study Abroad Re-Entry Conference. Many US colleges and universities now arrange these to support students who have recently returned home and promote study abroad on their campus.
- Integrate your international experience into your résumé and LinkedIn profile. Think about how you will highlight your experience in job interviews (include specifics such as personal growth, managing group dynamics, problem solving, etc.)
- Continue writing in your journal that you used abroad. This will help you keep your experience fresh in your mind while keeping things in perspective.
- Talk to former study abroad students on your campus. They will understand better than anyone your desire to share stories from your experiences, even after your friends and family have tired of hearing them!
- Stay in touch with the people you met while studying abroad; they can be your best link to your experience.
- Go to an elementary, middle, or high school language class and do a presentation about the country you went to.
- Know that you are not alone in your feelings! Usually, the students who were the most immersed in the local culture have the most difficulty in adjusting to life at home.
- Understand that you may not come home and find everything just as you left it. Likewise, you may have changed, and you need to learn how to assimilate back into US culture.

