



USC University of
Southern California

USC STUDENT TRAVEL ABROAD

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Congratulations on your decision to travel abroad! This is a big step and all of us at USC are committed to helping our students continue to grow personally, professionally, and academically during their time away from campus.

This handbook is a resource for all USC students traveling abroad. It was created by Dornsife Office of Overseas Studies, and edited by USC Strategic and Global Initiatives. Whether you have been abroad before or it will be your first time on an airplane, this handbook is for you. We encourage you to utilize the Table of Contents on the next page to navigate the document and refer to what is most helpful to your travel. Please direct questions about eligibility, credit, or program logistics to your program study abroad office or faculty member (for faculty-led programs). Your department will have the most up-to-date and helpful information regarding program specifics.

Emergency Support

INTERNATIONAL SOS ASSISTANCE CENTERS

USC Member ID: 11BSGCo00010 (CALL COLLECT)

In USA: Philadelphia, PA (215) 942-8226

If abroad: Contact the appropriate [Assistance Center](#) and provide the USC Member ID.

Visit the [International SOS website](#) or download their app for local contact information: www.internationalsos.com

USC EMERGENCY CONTACTS

USC Campus Support & Intervention:

+1-213-740-0411 | uscsupport@usc.edu

To get in touch with USC after regular business hours, contact **USC Department of Public Safety** at +1-213-740-4321

USC Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention:

+1-213-740-WELL (9355)*

**after hours, press zero "o" to speak to an on-call counselor*

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STUDENT AND PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES



Student Responsibilities

Travel, as in other settings, can have a major impact on a student's own well-being, health, and safety through the decisions they make before and during the program and by their day-to-day choices and behaviors.

Participants should:

- Read and carefully consider all materials issued by the sponsor that relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in host countries.
- Consider their health and other personal circumstances when applying for or accepting a place in a program.
- Make available to the sponsor accurate information about physical and mental health issues as necessary to plan for a safe and healthy study abroad experience.
- Assume responsibility for all the elements necessary for their personal preparation for the program and participate fully in orientations.
- Obtain and maintain appropriate insurance coverage and abide by any conditions imposed by the carriers.
- Inform parents/guardians/families and any others who may need to know about their participation in the study abroad program. Provide them with emergency contact information, and keep them informed on an ongoing basis.
- Be sensitive to local customs and cultural norms in the host country, including the homestay, dorm, or flat.
- Understand and comply with the terms of participation, codes of conduct, and emergency procedures of the program. Obey the laws of the host country.
- Be aware of local conditions and customs that may present health or safety risks when making daily choices and decisions. Promptly express any health or safety concerns to the program staff or other appropriate individuals.
- Behave in a manner that is respectful of the rights and well-being of others, and encourage others to behave in a similar manner.
- Accept responsibility for their own decisions and actions.
- Become familiar with the procedures for obtaining emergency health and law enforcement services in the host country.
- Follow the program policies for keeping program staff informed of their whereabouts and well-being.
- Look out for their fellow students, and assist them when necessary. If they notice that another's health or safety is at risk, bring that to the attention of the appropriate program representative, USC representative, or others, as deemed necessary. Programs and USC representatives are limited by law in what they can tell students' parents.

Parent Responsibilities

- Be aware that studying abroad will be a time of great independence and personal growth for your student, partly due to taking on some important responsibilities.
- Discuss with the student any of their travel plans and activities that may be independent of the study abroad program.
- Keep in touch with the student. But keep in mind that local conditions may prevent the student from immediately responding to you.
- Be aware that the student rather than the program may most appropriately provide some information.
- Remember time differences when contacting your student.
- Understand that if you call USC about your student, the Federal Education Rights of Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) may prohibit us from responding to you directly.





TYPES OF STUDENT TRAVEL ABROAD OPPORTUNITIES



USC recognizes all Student Travel Abroad in the following categories. The definitions provided below have been adapted from [The Forum on Education Abroad](#) glossary.

Student Travel Abroad

All University-related international travel by undergraduate or graduate students, whether as part of program, group, or individually. The travel can be credit-bearing or non-credit bearing.

Faculty-led

A study abroad program directed by a faculty member (or members) from the home campus who accompanies students abroad. Usually takes place as a Maymester, Julymester, Summer, Fall-Lead, or short-term trip during the academic year.

Student-led

Travel led by Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) and other student groups that choose to affiliate with the university and are willing to comply with the University's requirements. Any student group that receives university funds, uses the USC name, and/or receives support or guidance from a university school or department or individual faculty or staff member, will fall under this category.

Semester/Year-Long Programs

A program lasting roughly the length of a term on a U.S. semester calendar (generally about 12 to 17 weeks) or as long as a typical academic year of two semesters or three quarters (generally between about 26 and 45 weeks of actual coursework, excluding vacations).

Independent Student Travel

A USC Student traveling abroad independently, including Ph.D. students performing research, attending conferences, or any other University-related activity.



USC POLICIES AND ACADEMIC PROCEDURES



Student Travel Abroad policy — Destinations and Restriction Management

As a global university, USC encourages students to gain international experience through a variety of programs and opportunities abroad. Please see the [Student Travel Abroad — Destination Restrictions and Crisis Management Policy](#) to review the responsibilities of students, faculty and staff engaged in the process of organizing and managing student travel abroad.

Student Conduct

While you are overseas on a USC-approved study abroad program, the University Student Conduct Code and related university rules and regulations as stated in The [USC Student Handbook](#) still apply to you.

Attendance Policies

You are expected to adhere to the existing attendance policy that is set forth by your program. In most cases, the attendance policy will be as strict as or stricter than what you would encounter at USC. Be prepared to attend classes consistently.

Academic Advising

In consultation with your academic adviser, you should discuss courses to be taken abroad and what you will take upon your return to USC. You are responsible for getting written documentation from your academic adviser regarding your ability to receive major or minor credit for the new courses. If you take courses that do not apply to your major or minor, please keep two things in mind. First, not every course abroad is eligible for USC credit (e.g. Winemaking, Outdoor Education, Batik, CIEE's Intercultural Communication & Leadership, etc.). If USC does not offer a similar course, there is a chance that it may not be eligible for USC credit. If, as a result, your load of USC-recognized courses falls below 12 USC units, your financial aid will be severely affected. If in doubt, please contact your study abroad office.

Evidence of Coursework

We strongly suggest that you bring course syllabi and completed coursework (exams, papers & projects) back to USC after your semester/ year abroad. This is essential if you are engaged in any kind of independent study or internship. The documentation that you provide can be a big help if there is ever a question about awarding credit for work done overseas.

Internship Credit

USC has very strict guidelines for those students who wish to receive USC academic credit for an internship abroad. USC may award no credit or less credit than that awarded by the host institution. If you are interested in receiving credit for an internship abroad, discuss these plans with your study abroad office and academic adviser.

USC Registration Status (Block Enrollment)

Students will use USC Web Registration to register for “Overseas Block Enrollment” as a full-time student at USC. Your study abroad office will provide you with the information you need to register for “block units.” This process will ensure that your registration is continuous and that any financial aid you receive is not disrupted. Year-long students will need to block enroll twice - once for the fall term, and again (around December) for the spring term. Before you can be registered for your semester abroad, you must clear all holds. You can check for holds online on OASIS.

DO NOT GO OVERSEAS UNTIL YOU ARE PROPERLY REGISTERED.

Registration for Overseas Courses

Students on semester-long programs typically register for their actual overseas courses at the overseas university or program site, which sets its own rules regarding when you must settle on your final course selection. This registration process is totally independent of the USC Block Enrollment. These courses will only appear on your USC STARS Report after you have returned from your semester or year abroad and your transcript has been received by USC.

All students must take a full-time course load on their overseas program regardless of how many units they need and regardless of what constitutes a “full-time” course load on campus.

Students may not enroll in a Maymester, Julymester, USC Directed Research (490) course, or USC online course concurrently with a semester or year abroad program. Students may not enroll in any USC summer session that begins before the official end date of a spring or year-abroad program.

Do not enroll in too many units. USC has established a maximum number of units you may earn on your program. If you decide to take more than the maximum, be aware that you will be charged USC unit rate tuition for every attempted unit beyond 18 USC units.

Registration for When You Return

While abroad, you will be able to view the [USC Schedule of Classes online](#).

YOU are responsible for obtaining D-clearances from the appropriate s before you register. This can be done by e-mail. Pay close attention to time zone differences.

Your registration may be delayed if you have a financial (or some other type) hold. There are two ways to register for courses when you return:

1. Use the [online web registration system](#): Consult the Schedule of Classes online, and then go to the web registration website to register.
2. Ask a trusted friend or relative to register you via web registration. That person will need your ID number, PIN/password access code and clear instructions from you.

Please be aware that your future registration times may be impacted by the delay in USC receiving an official transcript from your host university/program.

Drop/add

If you decide to withdraw from a class during your semester away, you are bound by the program's add/drop policies. Nearly all other institutions' policies are stricter than USC's. If the other institution's rules are less strict than USC's, then you fall under USC's rules, which are as follows.

At USC, courses may be added only up to the 20 percent mark of the session and a student may drop a course without academic or financial penalty up until the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered. Your host institution may have a stricter policy.

Refer to the USC Schedule of Classes for exact deadlines for dropping a course or earning a "W" as programs vary in length.

Always get written documentation indicating drop and withdrawal dates, even if the overseas institution does not routinely use such documentation.

Final Transcripts and Grades

The Registrar of your study abroad program or overseas university will send your final program transcript to your study abroad office.

If you are asked to provide a mailing address for transcripts or billing, please be sure to use the address of your study abroad office and NOT your home address, USC Registrar, or USC Degree Progress.

Please be aware that it may take from several weeks to several months after completion of your program for your transcript to arrive at USC. Graduating seniors should keep this in mind.

Once your transcript has been received, your study abroad office will forward it to the Office of Academic Records and Registrar for processing.

For most credit-bearing programs, although you will receive grades from your overseas institution, courses taken abroad will appear on your USC transcript only as Credit/No Credit, which will not affect your USC GPA. You must earn a letter grade of C- or higher to receive credit. Students receive letter grades on the USC transcript for the USC Paris, USC Madrid, Annenberg London, and Annenberg London programs. Please confirm how your grades/credits will appear on your transcript with your department prior to committing to your program.

Please note: Although you may not receive letter grades on your USC transcript and your USC GPA may not be affected, please be aware that it is to your advantage to strive for the best grades you can get. Graduate schools, law schools, medical schools, and some employers may ask you to submit your letter grades obtained overseas in addition to your USC transcript.



USC HOUSING



Returning to USC Housing

Semester study abroad students currently in [USC Housing](#) who wish to be released from one semester of a housing contract must complete the Semester Away Form.

DO NOT SUBMIT THIS FORM IF YOU HAVE NOT YET BEEN ACCEPTED TO YOUR STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM.

Once you submit the form, your housing space will be assigned to another student.

Students who study abroad for a full academic year or any two consecutive semesters and wish to return to [USC Housing](#) must apply for housing as a first-time applicant. Campus housing questions should be directed to housing@usc.edu.

Other Housing Resources

Plan ahead. We suggest that you stay in touch with your friends and make arrangements early. Additional resources may include Facebook, Reddit, and other online groups for housing.

There are a number of property management companies that operate in the area. As you may be abroad when you are trying to arrange for housing near USC, we suggest that you enlist friends who will be on campus at USC while you are abroad to assist you in your search.

Please note: USC takes no responsibility for any off-campus housing arrangements.





FINANCIAL



Consult with your study abroad office for the latest information regarding the costs of your program. They can also assist with rough estimates of what students may expect to spend while abroad. The “personal expense” items on which students tend to spend the most money are travel during weekends and breaks, shopping, and entertainment. To limit your expenses, you are encouraged to make a budget prior to your trip.

Late Withdrawal

Most, if not all, programs have a final date you may withdraw without being charged a financial penalty. You are responsible to confirm with your study abroad office the final date you can withdraw from your study abroad program or course without penalty.

Billed Items

These are the items most often billed by USC:

- Tuition
- Housing
- Board
- USC administrative fee
- Tuition refund insurance (Optional)
- Health insurance
- Visa fees
- Orientation fees

Questions regarding billed items and costs associated with your program participation should be directed to your study abroad office. All payments should be made to USC through the regular fee bill process.

It is your responsibility to keep track of your USC fee bill on USCepay and arrange payments while you are overseas.

Students Using the Payment Plan Option

You should visit the Student Financial Services office or [website](#) and fill out a new payment plan worksheet. One way to calculate monthly payments is to add up all the items on the cost sheet that are billed by USC and divide the total by the total number of months of your overseas program. You may enroll in a [payment plan](#) via USCepay.

Airfare

As most program fees do NOT include airfare, you will likely need to make your own arrangements. Confirm with your study abroad office if this is the case prior to booking your flight. When researching flights, students are advised to consider baggage and other fees not included in their initial published fares.

Be sure to review the cancellation policies for your flights and be aware of all potential financial risks. USC strongly recommends you purchase Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) Insurance.

Program Withdrawal and Refund Policies

There are two types of withdrawal and refund policies to consider: those for the academic program and those for housing and other fees. Regarding the program, you are subject to the stricter of your program's refund policy and USC's refund policy. USC's policy of allowing students to withdraw by the end of the third week with little or no financial implications is generally less strict than the refund policies of most overseas institutions/program providers.

For some programs, students incur financial obligations well before the program begins.

Disbursement of Aid and Settlement of Account

Grants (such as University Grant, Pell Grant, and Cal Grant) and most scholarships (such as USC Merit Awards) are usually disbursed in the week before the start of USC classes. Some "direct loans" (such as Stafford, Perkins, and Parent PLUS loans) cannot be disbursed until 10 days before the start date of your particular study abroad program (see next section if your program starts before the USC semester). If you are reliant on those "direct loans" to settle your USC fee bill by the USC payment deadline, please email the Financial Aid Office so they can arrange a deferment for you.

If your USC fee bill is settled by grants and/or scholarships and you are planning to use "direct loan" funds for expenses not charged to your fee bill, please remember that those direct loans will not be accessible until 10 days before your program start date, so you must arrange your finances accordingly.

Students receiving financial aid should note that living expenses may be included in the costs of the program, and as a result, you may have a credit on your fee bill. Read on for information on accessing this credit.

We strongly recommend that you check your account on USCepay before you leave to make sure your bill is settled. Then check USCepay regularly, especially during the semester.

“My program starts before the USC semester!”

If your program starts before the USC semester, your financial aid will not have been disbursed by the program start date. Fortunately, tuition and health insurance fees for these programs will not be due until the USC semester begins. Students on these programs, however, will need to purchase airfare and bring sufficient funds for personal expenses and initial housing costs (for some programs) until their financial aid is disbursed around the beginning of the USC semester.

Accessing Student Account (Fee Bill) Credit

If you do have a credit on your fee bill after all aid and scholarships have been disbursed and all charges have been billed, you can receive your refund by Electronic Refund only.

Electronic Refund Authorization

We strongly recommend that you set up eRefund service with the USC Cashier’s Office. If you arrange for an electronic refund, the Cashier’s Office will check electronically for a balance on your fee bill twice a week during the USC semester. If there is a credit on your fee bill, the money will be automatically wired to your designated checking account.

To apply, you must complete the application form on the USC Student Financial Services website: www.usc.edu/sfs. If you have already applied, you do not need to do it again.

If you set up this authorization, monitor your checking account carefully. You do not want to spend money that was credited to your account erroneously.

Electronic refund authorization continues even after you return to campus. You may withdraw from eRefund anytime on USCepay.

WARNING: If you receive a large refund during the first four weeks of school, be sure to check your fee bill on OASIS and see that all charges associated with your semester abroad are listed. Don’t spend a \$5000 refund only to find out that you still owe \$3500 for housing.

Financial Aid Deadlines

It is imperative that you meet all financial aid deadlines for submission of all forms, including copies of tax returns or non-filing statements, CSS profiles, and FAFSA's, in order to be considered for financial aid for the next academic year.

Please see the financial aid website for specific deadlines at:

<https://financialaid.usc.edu/>

Tuition Refund Insurance

Tuition Refund Insurance offers a tuition refund in case a major illness or injury forces you to leave your program early. The cost is approximately .32 of 1% of the total tuition and mandatory fees for your program, as listed on the Cost Sheet.

Students are strongly encouraged to get Tuition Refund Insurance, but have the choice to decline it when you register for overseas block enrollment.

More information can be found on [USC's Tuition Refund Insurance Program](#) website.



PRACTICAL MATTERS



Passports

If you do not have a passport or a current passport that is valid through 6 months after the end of your program, you should apply for a new passport immediately.

Information on applying for a passport can be found on the U.S. Department of State website for [How to Apply for a U.S. Passport.](#)

There may be delays in the processing of U.S. passport initial applications and renewals. Don't take any chances. Apply early.

Visas

A visa is official permission granted by the authorities of the country where you will study or travel that allows you to enter and remain in the country for a certain amount of time. A visa is usually in the form of a stamp or sticker placed inside your passport. Some countries (e.g. Australia) now issue electronic visas for which nothing is placed in your passport; instead, the authorization to enter the country is linked to your passport number.

If your host country does not require a visa, you will need special documentation to be there as a student. You may not stay in your host country as a tourist. Consult your host country's embassy and/or consulate website.

A student visa is required to enter many of the countries in which USC programs operate. Visa requirements for U.S. citizens may vary from those for citizens of other countries.

The documentation and fees required to obtain a visa vary greatly from country to country, and even between different consulates of the same country. Some countries will require a signed medical form or letter from a physician or certain immunizations. Some require an HIV test, tax return, or criminal background checks.

For some countries, you need to apply for a visa as far as 3 months in advance. Most consulates will keep your passport while they are processing your visa application. This may force you to alter pre-program international travel plans.

Please note that for some visas you need to apply in person at the nearest consulate in the US. Most programs will inform you directly if you need a visa to enter your host country.

Questions about the visa process should be directed to your program provider and your study abroad.

It is ultimately the student's responsibility to obtain the visa.

Visas for Non-U.S. Citizens

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you should consult the nearest consulate of the country of your citizenship and the nearest consulate of the country where you plan to study. The procedures you will follow are different from those for U.S. citizens. It is important to initiate this process as soon as possible to assemble the documents and allow time for lengthy procedures.

Non-U.S. citizens should also check to see if a transit visa is required for the countries they pass through on the way to their ultimate destination, and whether they need a visa to travel to other countries during the semester.

Re-Entry to the U.S.

U.S. permanent residents must check with the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) concerning regulations for re-entry into the U.S. It is particularly important to verify procedures for those who contemplate being outside of the U.S. for more than six months or are in the process of applying for citizenship.

International students must see an [adviser](#) at the Office of International Services (OIS) to obtain important information regarding regulations and documentation to leave and re-enter the United States.

DACA students should consult with their study abroad adviser.

PREPARING TO BE AWAY



Absentee Voting

You can cast a ballot from overseas. To receive an absentee ballot, you must be registered to vote at home. You can find all of the information you need to register for [Absentee Voting](#) on the Department of State website.

Income Taxes

If you are planning to be abroad for the spring term, you may be out of the country between January 1st and April 15th when most of us are struggling to file income taxes. People temporarily living abroad can request an extension for filing taxes, normally until June 15th.

Tax forms are easily downloaded and filed at www.irs.gov/. Make sure that you can get your W2 forms sent to you overseas or can access them online if you choose to file while you are abroad.

Property Insurance

Loss or theft of property can occur while you are overseas. USC-Sponsored Travel Health Insurance does not include any property insurance. Many homeowners and renters' insurance policies contain a clause about coverage of your personal property.

Check your/ your parents' policies to see if it extends worldwide. Normally you will need to file a copy of a police report following a loss or theft of property. Please be advised that if a loss or theft occurs because of negligence on your part, your claim will usually not be honored. Student Property Insurance can be obtained at www.nssi.com.

Power of Attorney/Proxy Status

If you have financial or legal dealings that will be difficult to manage from abroad, consider assigning a power of attorney or proxy.

Working Abroad

People on student visas or tourist visas are usually barred from working legally in the host country. There are very few exceptions, notably Australia; if you are thinking about working while you study overseas, you should do your homework about what the possibilities are.

Packing your Bags

Students are encouraged to research the environment they will be living in and pack what is relevant to that particular program. Use the following lists as basic guidelines and pick and choose what is essential for you. The obvious things (e.g., underwear, shirts, toothbrush, etc.) are not listed. Be sure to consult the specific information provided for your program, as well as recommendations from former participants.

The best and most ignored advice is to TRAVEL LIGHT. You will hear this over and over again and for good reason. Do not bring more luggage than you can comfortably carry and/or roll by yourself. You may find yourself having to walk long distances with your bags. Any items that could be considered a weapon (e.g., scissors, Swiss Army knives, etc.) should not be packed in your carry-on luggage, but placed in your checked luggage. You should bring important medications and documents in your carry-on luggage.

Baggage allowances may differ for international flights to and from the U.S. and flights between and within other countries. Rules also vary from airline to airline. Do not make assumptions based on previous travels or advice from friends and/or family. Always check with your airline for carry-on and checked baggage regulations and fees.

LOST DOCUMENT KIT

Losing a passport and other documents can be a major headache; to reduce the hassle, we suggest that you take with you two U.S. - produced passport photos, and a certified copy of the face page of your passport (which you can shrink to wallet size). Keep these items separate from your actual passport, and leave a copy with your parents or trusted friend at home. You should also have two sets of photocopies of other important documents such as your USC ID card, driver's license, and your credit, debit, and insurance cards; leave one set with your parents or trusted friend, and keep one set in your homestay or dorm separate from the actual documents.

Important Documents (not a complete list):

- Passport, visa, and photocopies
- Airline tickets (including e-ticket confirmations and receipts)
- International SOS information
- Emergency information card
- International Student ID card (ISIC card)
- Driver's license (with photocopy)
- Credit cards, debit cards
- Prescription for contact lenses/glasses
- Prescription for medications (if any)

MEDICINE AND TOILETRIES

- Prescription medicine (carry a copy of the prescription too); and keep medication in the original bottle/container it came in. Don't mix pills in one bottle. Carry all medication and scripts in your personal/hand luggage.
- Soap and shampoo (just enough to start with, then you can buy locally)
- First aid kit (small)
- Contraceptives/condoms
- Tampons/pads, enough for the first month. Note: tampons may be hard to find in some developing countries or may not come with applicators.
- Extra eyeglasses
- Extra contact lenses and solution.
- Hand sanitizer

CLOTHING

- Sturdy walking shoes
- Flip-flops (good for showering in hostels)
- Shorts (may not be appropriate in certain cultures)
- sweater/sweatshirt

- Wind and rain gear
- Swimwear
- 1-2 nice outfits
- Winter coat, gloves, scarf, hat (depending on location).
- Keep in mind that you can always buy clothes there!

GIFT SUGGESTIONS

- Students staying in a homestay may wish to bring a small gift to their host family.
- Clothing and items with USC logo
- Cookbooks with American recipes
- Coffee table photo books from your region of the U.S.
- Baseball caps
- Calendars with U.S. scenery
- U.S.-style paraphernalia (Disney, Warner Bros., NBA)
- Handmade crafts or jewelry

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

- Swiss Army knife (useful when backpacking, be sure to pack in checked luggage)
- Journal
- Books, guides, maps
- Day backpack
- Heavy duty ziploc bags
- Sewing kit
- Luggage lock and tags
- Battery powered alarm clock
- Towel and washcloth
- Money belt/pouch
- Chargers/portable charger

Choose a sturdy luggage that will stand up to rough treatment. A backpack is extremely handy if you plan to travel before or after your program. Make sure that your luggage is clearly labeled so you can recognize it easily. After you have packed everything, try carrying all of your luggage. Also be aware of airline fees for checked baggage.

For advice on packing light:

www.ehow.com

www.ricksteves.com

INFORMATION SECURITY GUIDELINES - LAPTOPS & COMPUTERS

Information Security is a critical aspect to consider when traveling abroad, particularly when traveling with electronic devices such as a laptop, tablet, or smartphone or when accessing USC resources from other countries. As a student, your device, and online accounts, may contain sensitive information related to your study at USC, personal life, and possibly work. To better protect your devices and information while traveling, here is a comprehensive set of guidelines:

1. **Research Computer Access at Your Study Site:**

- Find out what kind of computer access is available at your study site overseas. Understanding the facilities and resources available can help you plan accordingly.
- Do not enter your passwords on devices or computers, in shared locations, especially those in internet cafes or hotel business centers.

2. **Check Plug Compatibility and Get Adapters:**

- Find out what kind of plugs are used in the country you're traveling to and ensure you have the right plug adapters to charge your laptop.
- Use only the chargers and cables you brought with you. No hotel, airplane, coffee shop, or other chargers should be used. This also includes any other accessories, like battery packs and even headphones. Shared charging devices and cables can contain malware that gets installed on devices when connected.

3. Consider Security and Storage:

- Remember to consider security and storage options, especially if you will be traveling after the study program ends. Keep your laptop secure and avoid leaving it unattended.

4. Review Insurance Coverage:

- Check whether your laptop is covered under any insurance policies you or your parents may have, such as homeowner's insurance, to protect against loss, theft, or damage.

5. Use USC's VPN for Online Resources:

- Access USC's online resources (email, OASIS, library) securely through USC's intranet using VPN (Virtual Private Network). VPN ensures student access to all resources while off-site, even in countries with site restrictions like Facebook and Twitter. Log-on using the instructions at vpn.usc.edu.

6. Password Protection and Encryption:

- Set a strong login password or PIN and enable full disk encryption to protect your device and data. USC requires 16 character passphrases for USC devices and recommends you do the same for your personal devices whenever possible. 6 digit PINs are recommended for mobile devices.

7. Keep Software Updated:

- Regularly update your operating system, antivirus software, and applications to allow security updates from the vendor.
- USC provides personal versions of the antivirus software, SentinelOne that can be installed on personal machines after downloading from here: https://sites.usc.edu/trojansecure/security_services/sentinelone/sentinelone-personal-edition-faq/ (please note you must login with your USC NetID to access this software)

8. Multi Factor Authentication (MFA):

- Enable MFA on your accounts for an extra layer of security.

9. Backup Your Data:

- Back up important files to an external hard drive or secure cloud service before traveling.

10. Disable Auto-Connect and File Sharing:

- Turn off automatic Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connections and disable file-sharing options on public networks.

11. Be Cautious with Public Wi-Fi:

- Avoid using unsecured public Wi-Fi networks for sensitive tasks or use a VPN when necessary.

12. Be Wary of Shoulder Surfing:

- Protect sensitive information from prying eyes in public places.

13. Separate Personal and Work Accounts:

- Create separate user accounts to keep personal and work-related data compartmentalized.

14. Secure Physical Environment:

- Choose accommodations with in-room safes or lockable storage for your electronic devices.

15. Report Lost or Stolen Devices Immediately:

- Notify your department IT/ USC ITS (security@usc.edu) if your laptop containing sensitive information is lost or stolen.

16. Carry a Laptop Sleeve or Case:

- Protect your device from physical damage and maintain a low profile.

By following these comprehensive security guidelines, taking necessary precautions, and utilizing USC's VPN for online resources, you can ensure the safety and security of your laptop, personal information, and academic/work-related data during your studies abroad.



TRAVEL LOGISTICS



Traveling to Your Destination

Most programs do not have “group flights,” so you will likely need to arrange your own travel to arrive at your program site by the date specified by the program.

Always compare not only ticket prices, but also refund policies and ticket change prices.

Airlines typically will not allow their customers to fly into a foreign country on a one-way ticket. As some countries require visitors to show their return ticket in order to acquire a visa, airlines have difficulty keeping track of certain requirements. In order to streamline their approach, most airlines simply will not allow a customer to board without purchasing a return ticket. All students should therefore purchase a round-trip ticket.

We strongly suggest students purchase Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) flight insurance or a fully refundable ticket.

International Student Identity Card (ISIC)

It is also recommended to purchase an [International Student Identity Card \(ISIC\)](#). The ISIC is recognized worldwide and entitles you to supplemental accident/sickness insurance, as well as significant travel and entertainment discounts.

Traveling While You Are Abroad

Train: There are many kinds of rail passes available for travel in Europe and beyond. Some passes must be purchased in the U.S., while some may be purchased only overseas. Consult with a travel agency specializing in student travel before deciding which pass to get. Students sometimes buy passes prematurely, before exploring all the options, and regret having wasted their money. In many countries, bus travel will be easier and cheaper.

Air Travel: In some countries, low-cost airlines such as Virgin Australia, Ryanair, EasyJet, and Jetstar offer the fastest and cheapest way to travel. Before buying train tickets, be sure to research flight prices. Booking in advance can save you a lot of money.

Driving: We strongly discourage you from renting or buying cars while you are overseas. Driving in a foreign country is dangerous and traffic accidents are among the leading causes of injury and death of students abroad.

If you decide to travel by car, you will need to demonstrate that you are a legally qualified driver. Sometimes your U.S. driver’s license will work, but you should consider obtaining an International Driver’s License, issued by the American Automobile Club (AAA). They are valid for 1 year and cost \$20 (a passport-sized photo is required).

Hostels

Hosteling is one of the truly great things about student travel. Youth hostels - many of which are not restricted to so-called “youth”, which in many parts of the world means under 26 - are cheap, mostly clean, often extremely well-located, and a great place to meet fellow adventurers and travelers. Most youth hostels are set up like dormitories, with large single-sex group rooms, usually bunk beds, but some offer private rooms too. Some youth hostels impose strict curfews and lock the front door at a certain time; some insist that you provide your own sheet; some ask that you pitch in and do a chore - usually sweeping the dormitory.

The International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF) card may be required for some youth hostels and often can be purchased directly at a youth hostel. You can buy a membership online and learn a lot more about hosteling at [Hosteling International](#) and find hostels on [Hostelworld](#). Be sure to research the hostel and surrounding area for potential safety & security risks prior to booking a hostel or other accommodation.

Excessive Travel

Many students view a semester or year abroad as their “one shot” at traveling overseas. However, as the world gets smaller and the workplace more global, many of you will have opportunities in the future to travel for work and for pleasure. We strongly advise against spending your entire time abroad as a “tourist.” For example, if you are in Florence for a semester, make sure that you spend some weekends in Florence as the Florentines do. We understand that it will be tempting to go out of town every weekend, but you will really miss out on some of the pleasures and subtleties of being a resident of a foreign city. You cannot expect to make local friends if you frequently travel out of your host city.



Communication

EMAIL

E-mail is our main line of communication with students overseas.

USC will send e-mails only to the USC e-mail address that you listed in your study abroad application. If you open a different e-mail account, please ensure that e-mail sent to your USC account gets forwarded to your new account; otherwise, you will miss important information.

CELL PHONES

Depending on the length of travel, students opt to purchase cell phones overseas and buy minutes on a prepaid basis as it is usually the cheapest and simplest option. If you bring your own cell phone, you can usually purchase a new SIM card overseas. Check rates carefully! Using your phone's internet service while roaming can be very costly. Check with your provider about international service fees. Also, pay special attention to data fees and limits.

Prior to departure, be sure to research which apps are most commonly used to communicate in your destination country. For example, WhatsApp is commonly used around the world to send unlimited messages and make video calls to avoid costs associated with sending text messages.

Money and Banking

The most common ways to access money while you are overseas are:

- Debit Cards
- Credit Cards
- Mobile Payments (i.e. Apple Pay or Google Pay)

We suggest that, if possible, you have multiple options available to you just in case there is a problem with one or the other.

Find out the best method(s) of transferring money in your host country. Ask alumni and do some investigating before and after you arrive at your host country.

DEBIT CARDS

Make arrangements with your bank for a debit card that you can use overseas. Check how much they will charge you each time you withdraw money abroad at an ATM or use your card in a store. These charges can really add up. Since your account balance may not show up on your ATM receipt overseas, it is important to track your balance via online banking. Ask your bank if they have a partner bank in your host country that will not charge ATM fees.

Make sure that your PIN number has 4 digits and can be used internationally. Memorize your PIN by the numerical digits rather than by the letters of the alphabet.

Make sure that your PIN number has 4 digits and can be used internationally. Memorize your PIN by the numerical digits rather than by the letters of the alphabet.

Don't expect ATMs to be accessible 24 hours a day, even if you see a sign saying one is open 24 hours. Don't expect all ATMs to accept your card. You may find in some countries that you can use your debit card at ATM machines but not at "points of sale" such as stores and restaurants.

EMERGENCY FUNDS

We suggest pre-paid Visa cards kept in a safe separate location as an emergency source of funds if your debit card is lost or stolen. You may also consider traveler's checks.

CREDIT CARDS

We strongly suggest that you bring a credit card with you overseas for emergencies. A credit card can help you secure accommodation, flights and other services in a hurry.

Credit cards often give the most favorable exchange rate. In general, Visa and MasterCard are most widely used overseas. Major credit card companies charge currency conversion service fees, so check with your credit card company to find out how much those are.

Keep close track of your expenses. Make sure you have a way to make regular payments. Check your statements regularly and check to see if your card comes with fraud protection. Avoid letting your card out of your sight when dining or making purchases. Credit card fraud and theft are rampant in some countries.

Before going abroad, we strongly recommend that you contact your bank or credit card company and let them know you will be using your card overseas, what countries you plan on visiting, and the duration of your stay. They will then place a travel alert on your account so that your overseas card use is not mistaken for identity theft and fraud. Without the travel alert, they may block your card entirely if they detect suspicious card activity. This advice applies to debit cards, too.

CASH

Many countries are much more cash-based, especially for small purchases, than the U.S. In some countries, exchanging cash may be the best way to obtain local currency. Check with individual programs since carrying large amounts cash can pose a risk.

BANK ACCOUNTS

Most students DO NOT open bank accounts overseas, except Australia, Ireland and New Zealand semester students and some yearlong students. If you want to open a bank account, be sure to understand the terms and conditions of your account, such as service fees.

FOREIGN CURRENCY

Familiarize yourself with the currency you will be using. Follow the exchange rates for several days or weeks in the newspaper or on the internet. Consult the Universal Currency Converter.

By the time you arrive in your host country, you should know how much \$1US equals in the host country currency.

CHANGING MONEY

U.S. airports usually DO NOT have very favorable exchange rates, so it may be preferable to exchange just enough for incidentals and transportation from the airport to your housing. Also, most international airports have currency exchange booths (though they may have limited hours) and now most international airports have ATM machines that will accept your U.S. debit card and issue money in the currency of your destination country.

Banks tend to have the best exchange rates, but make sure you understand what rate of commission you are being charged. Try to avoid changing money in places like hotels, restaurants or shops. Changing money on the street may be very risky and is illegal in many countries.

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GENERAL TIPS FOR BUDGETING

The overall cost of living abroad can sometimes be higher than at home in part because you are in an unfamiliar environment and you are confronted with a lot of possibilities and temptations to spend money. Here are a few budgeting tips to keep in mind:

- Make both daily and weekly budgets and try to stick to them. Learn the value of the money wherever you are. Be careful not to fall into the habit of equating one unit of foreign currency with \$1 US.
- Costs for the first month are usually higher because you are settling in. After the first few weeks you should be able to do more with less money.
- Always be on the lookout for student rates and discounts. Most countries are far more generous with student discount tickets, travel, even meals, than the U.S. is, so keep your eyes open. Local students are a great source of tips and useful information.
- Staying relatively local and going off the beaten path will usually save you money (and give you a unique experience).
- Try to use libraries and the program's resources before rushing out and buying a lot of books. Watch how students of the host country manage books and supplies.
- Try cooking for yourself whenever possible. Going to a grocery store in another country can be a very educational experience!
- When you travel, stay in youth hostels. They are fun, usually clean and well located, and you will meet students and travelers from all over the world.

What to Research Before Going Abroad

Some students may be tempted to limit their exposure to information about the place they will visit. They may think that this is a good strategy to guarantee an experience full of surprises and discoveries. This is false logic. Even if you do a good deal of research on where you are going, you are sure to experience new things.

If you go with little or no knowledge at all, the amazing discoveries you make are often very superficial; you are just scratching the surface. When you go armed with some information, you'll be ready to make much deeper discoveries and gain more profound insights!

Check the Resources at the back of the handbook for suggested websites.

EXPLORING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES



Understanding Difference

As much as you may be aware intellectually that people living in other countries have a different culture and hold different values and expectations from yours, living in and interacting with another culture 24 hours a day, 7 days a week is bound to pose some challenges. Try to value the cultural differences you encounter and make every attempt to empathize with the host culture's values. Being aware of how a person expects to be treated (e.g. at a store, restaurant, or in an educational institution) can make cross-cultural experiences more understandable and less trying.

While you are abroad, you may encounter stereotypes of people from the United States. People in your host country may already have ideas about you through interactions with the media, tourists, or coworkers. The following is a list of common stereotypes that students have encountered.

(Adapted from IES London by the Institute for the International Education of Students)

Americans are often seen as:

- hard-working
- wealthy
- confident they have all the answers
- aggressive
- racially prejudiced
- extravagant, wasteful
- Naïve
- disrespectful of authority
- outgoing, friendly
- loud, rude, boastful
- optimistic
- superficial
- generous
- informal
- always in a hurry
- ignorant of other countries

Why do you think these stereotypes exist? What image do you project as an American, and what image do you want to project?

What stereotypes do you have about people in your host country? How can you challenge those stereotypes?

While others may have ideas about you as an American, it is also important to analyze how you perceive yourself. Dr. L. Robert Kohls, author of *Survival Kit for Overseas Living*, has composed a list of values that many Americans report that they adhere to:

- There is no such thing as “fate”; everyone has control over what happens in his life.
- Change is indisputably good, leading to development, improvement, and progress.
- Time is of the utmost importance and needs to be used productively.
- Americans see themselves as highly individualistic in their thoughts and actions.
- Competition brings out the best in any individual in any system.
- “Keeping busy”, even in times of recreation, is highly valued in American society.
- Americans are informal in most areas of their life, from language to dress.
- The direct approach is the best, most open, and most honest approach.
- Americans are realistic, practical, and efficient, avoiding being overly sentimental in decision-making.
- Americans value newness and innovations, thus creating a constant need to upgrade to the next best thing and fostering materialism.

With which of these values do you agree? Which of these values do you anticipate may conflict with the values of your host country?

One reaction to such conflicts in values is to resort to stereotyping the entire culture. Such stereotyping can go both ways; that is, you generalize about your host culture, and people in the host culture generalize about Americans.

A great resource for further exploration of the issues introduced in this section is the University of the Pacific’s [“What’s Up with Culture?”](#) website, which is an online course for students about to study abroad that offers some great self-guided activities and exercises. Check it out!

Culture Shock

Culture shock is a real and usually temporary state that occurs when you are totally immersed in a new culture. It is usually characterized by feelings of bewilderment, disorientation and mental fatigue. It is not uncommon for people going through culture shock to feel “fed up” and depressed about their new situation. You might find yourself going through a period of time in which you feel resentful of the new culture and new place that is placing so many challenges upon you. This is a normal reaction to living abroad and in some ways is a positive sign: you are really immersing yourself in a new culture.

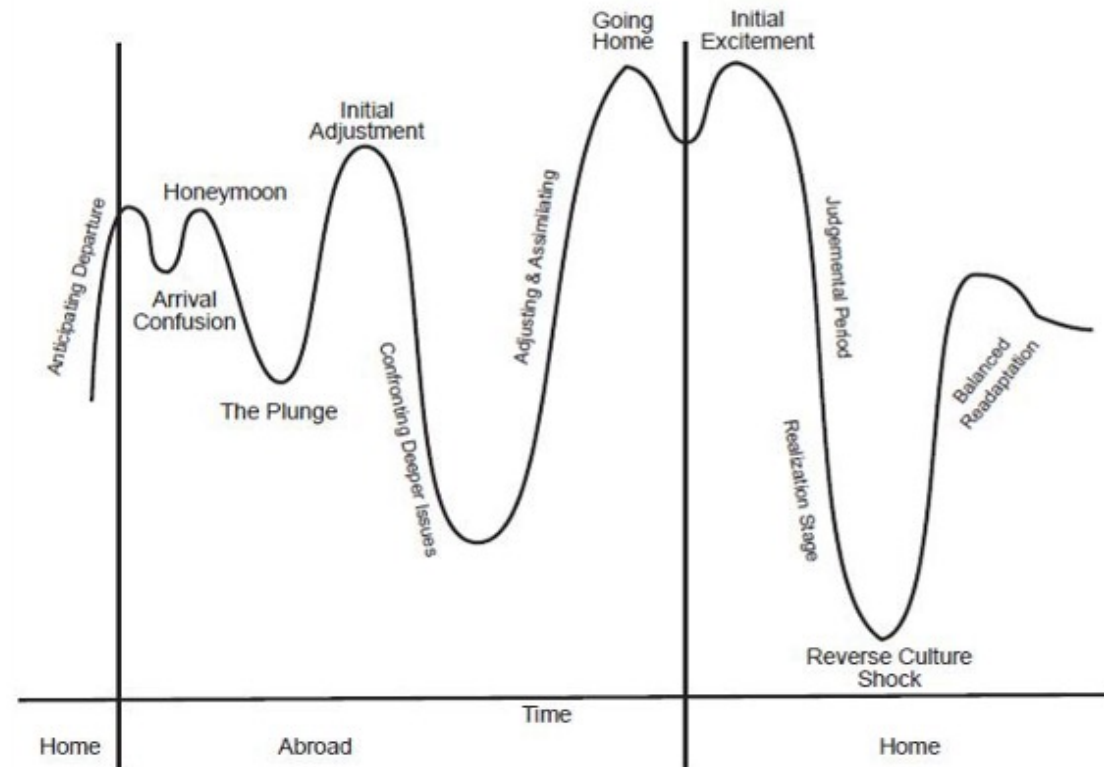
We have included here a few short readings about culture shock. If you can recognize the signs of culture shock, you can deal with it more effectively.

Remember: It is temporary and a sign that you are being “culturally challenged” -- ultimately a good thing.

THE STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

(Adapted from IES Family Guide by the Institute for the International Education of Students)

Adapting to a new environment and new culture has been compared to an emotional roller-coaster. An individual's highs and lows and twists and turns will vary significantly. The information below on the stages of transition and suggestions for culture shock is intended only as a rough guide.



Anticipating Departure

During this exciting time of preparation, people naturally form expectations and goals. For some, the anticipation becomes overwhelming, while some try so hard not to build up any expectations that they also fail to make any preparations. It is important to remain realistic in your expectations so you will not face disappointments when you settle in while abroad.

Suggestions: Research the country, read some of its important works of literature, and read its newspapers on the Internet. Listen to online radio stations from your host country. It is also useful to start a journal that defines your goals and expectations for your time abroad. These activities will help give you a sense of understanding of and attachment to your host country.

Arrival Confusion

This can be a trying and disorienting period that includes jet lag, meeting new friends, language fatigue, new food, new rules and customs, and in some cases a whole new educational system.

Suggestions: During this period, you may find yourself calling home, upset about housing, the city, jet lag, or local people. It's important to talk with the local program staff. They have dealt with many students in these situations and are ready and able to help you during this period.

The Honeymoon

In this stage, students are swimming in fascination and a sense of adventure. Many students report being on a cultural high and feel that everything is wonderful.

Suggestions: This is a good time to stockpile some of the good experiences for when times become more challenging. It's also a good time to begin inquiring about differences in food, people, and other cultural variances. For students taking medication for anxiety or depression, this is not at all a good time to stop taking your medication despite the temptation to do so.

The Plunge

This is when the novelty wears off and reality sets in. You may feel frustrated and confused. Rather than simply observing others' behavior, you need to start to change your own way of thinking and doing things. You need to begin adjusting to new ways of communicating and differences in living styles, food, social customs, and classroom interactions. Although difficult, this stage prepares you to engage with the new culture at a deeper level.

Suggestions: Avoid making value judgments on cultural differences. Instead, strive to understand these differences.

Initial Adjustment

As you develop language and social skills, you become more confident. Local transportation, communication, and social customs become a normal part of your everyday life. Many of the initially confusing differences begin to make sense and you may begin to be able to balance the positives and negatives within the culture.

Suggestions: Cultural differences are not problems to be solved. Understanding these cultural differences and responding appropriately are major accomplishments for which you should give yourself a pat on the back.

Confronting Deeper Issues

At this stage, you begin to confront cultural issues and personal differences at a deeper level and begin to see a multitude of approaches to your life abroad. You may question deeper assumptions about the world and may feel isolated at times during this stage.

Suggestions: Go ahead and explore your values and beliefs. Write in your journal about what is going on.

Adapting and Assimilating

You begin to identify with new ways of thinking and doing. You may establish strong friendships with local people or may have to accept that you will not have time to develop deep friendships. You are comfortable with your home identity as well as the adapted identity you've developed in the new culture.

Suggestions: Not all students reach this stage, especially in just a semester, so don't beat yourself up if you don't get there.

Going Home

The program is winding down and you want to take a few more pictures, visit places you still haven't seen, say farewell to friends, and pack for home, all while you are dealing with final exams and papers. You may start to reflect on what you've accomplished and where you have been. You may also feel sad about leaving the place you've just begun to feel used to!

Suggestions: Refer to the "Top Ten Immediate Re-Entry Challenges" at the end of this handbook.

RECOGNIZING CULTURE SHOCK

(from University of Kansas' Study Abroad Handbook)

The reaction to culture shock varies from person to person but may include irritability, depression, loss of appetite, loss of sleep (or conversely compensations such as overeating or sleeping excessively), anger, loss of self-esteem... A student with culture shock may want to go home (and sometimes he/she does) or may develop a very hostile stance toward the host culture.

Americans with Culture Shock: Four Common Behaviors

The Fugitive avoids contact and spends a lot of time in their room. Lots of texts and emails home and long hours of sleep are signs of this reaction. Blame falls on foreign culture and on self. They feel ashamed to feel homesick after having dreamt of a great time abroad.

The Critic draws no comparisons and casts blame on all sides, playing no favorites. The weather is intolerable, the prices exorbitant, the people dull or rude, etc. The academic program is trivial, the teachers uninspiring, the students infantile and everything is going wrong.

The Chauvinist talks endlessly to those who will listen, underlining the contrast between the U.S. and abroad. Their appreciation for the U.S. has surged upward and they put the local culture down.

The Native cuts down the U.S. and wants to melt into the crowd. A loner, they shut off all contact with other Americans and feel tempted to never return to the States, that land without culture.

COPING STRATEGIES: CULTURE SHOCK/CULTURAL FATIGUE

While you cannot avoid initial culture shock, you can take steps to make it more manageable. Explore the area you're living in, find a map, and strike out on your own. Set attainable goals. Observe people closely and try and pick up the silent language. Avoid clustering with your American friends. Join a club or a sports group at your university, or in your neighborhood. Keep a journal and watch yourself change. Above all, keep an open mind and try to accept the people and culture rather than resist them. This requires great maturity, perceptiveness, and skill in cross-cultural communication.

Cultural Differences and Expectations For Women

In some study abroad programs, women have said that attitudes they have encountered abroad, both in public and private interactions between men and women, were quite challenging.

Local customs with regard to both men's and women's (assumptions about gender) roles vary widely from country to country. Some men openly demonstrate their "appreciation" of women in ways that many women find offensive. American women are seen as liberated in many ways, and sometimes the cultural misunderstandings that come out of that image can lead to difficult and unpleasant experiences.

It is not uncommon to be honked at, stared at, verbally and loudly approved of, and, in general, to be actively noticed simply for being a woman, and, in particular, an American woman. Even eye contact or a smile from you may result in totally unexpected invitations. Sometimes the attention can be flattering. Soon, it may become very annoying and potentially even angering. Local women, who often get the same sort of treatment, have been taught, either explicitly or through experience, how to ignore the attention. Many American students have found that hard to do. You are encouraged to learn what the unwritten rules are about what you can and cannot do.

Women can provide support for each other. Former students suggest that you get together several times early in your program to talk about what works and what doesn't for dealing with unwanted attention.

Recommended Resources:

[Diversity Abroad: Women Going Abroad](#)

[U.S. Department of State: Information for Women Travelers](#)

[Transitions Abroad: Best Women Travel Websites and Blogs](#)

[Middlebury College: Gender](#)

[Harvard Global Support Services: How to Deal with Street Harassment Abroad](#)

[The Institute for Study Abroad \(IFSA\) Student Stories: Gender Abroad](#)

Information on Racial and Ethnic Difference

Regrettably, racism occurs in overt and covert ways all over the world. It is impossible to generalize accurately about the relative level of racism in various countries. The program resident director or the university's international students' office can usually provide information and advice about local conditions. Minority students studying overseas have occasionally been the victims of overt racism. Keep in mind, however, that seemingly offensive behavior is not always due to racism. Some people in your host country may never have seen or met a minority before; they may be curious about you and may express their curiosity in an awkward way. In other cases, racism may be due to ignorance, as some people know nothing about minorities other than the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media. Try to distinguish between genuine racists (who are probably few in number) and people who will really benefit from getting to know you. Keep an open mind. Remember that your host country has a very different historical background from the U.S.



Dr. Joy Carew, Director of the Center for Critical Languages and Cultures at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, in writing about the U.S. minority student abroad, states:

“The experience is not always positive, but it is almost certainly constructive. If you are a minority student, you may learn a lot about your identity as an American through your first experience in a foreign culture. In some cases, you will be considered simply an ‘American’ with no regard to your identity as a “hyphenated American,” a situation that may leave you uncomfortable and force you to reassess your identity. Conversely, in other cases, locals may not be able to accept that you are a ‘real American’ if you do not fit their image of ‘Americans’ as Caucasians. Some minority students overseas experience liberating freedom from the baggage of being a “hyphenated American.” If you have grown up as a minority in America, you have probably developed considerable skill in interpreting the sometimes perplexing behaviors and expectations of the majority culture. This mental skill will serve you well while abroad.”

In addition, so-called [“heritage seeking students”](#) (e.g., Korean-Americans going to study in Korea) may encounter some unique issues. For example, a Korean-American in Korea may be expected to speak Korean well and follow Korean social norms, while Americans of other heritage may receive admiration for knowing only a little Korean and may not be expected to adhere to local social rules of behavior.

Recommended Resources:

[Diversity Abroad Culture & Diversity Destination Guides](#)

[Diversity Abroad Articles](#)

[Study Abroad Matters: Top 10 Reasons for African American Students to Go Abroad](#)

[The Institute for Study Abroad \(IFSA\) Student Stories: Racial and Ethnic Identity](#)

[The PLATO Project/AllAbroad: For Native American Students](#)

[The PLATO Project/AllAbroad: For Hispanic/ Latin@ American Students](#)

[The PLATO Project/AllAbroad: For Asian/ Pacific Islander Students](#)

Being LGBTQ+ Abroad

It is important to be aware of the general attitudes of the populace in your host country toward the LGBTQ+ members of their community.

LGBTQ+ students who are not familiar with the legal status and the attendant cultural attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identification in the host country might consider gathering information online and talking to LGBTQ+ students who have studied abroad.

Transgender students should consult with a study abroad adviser about gender identification on travel documents and health and safety considerations particular to their host country.

Recommended Resources:

[Diversity Abroad: LGBTQ+ Students Abroad](#)

[Human Rights Watch: LGBT Rights](#)

[NAFSA: Association of International Educators: Rainbow Special Interest Group \(SIG\)](#)

[U.S. Department of State: LGBTQI+ Travelers](#)

[The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association \(ilga\)](#)

[SUNY Oswego: Diversity and Identity Abroad](#)

[The Institute for Study Abroad \(IFSA\) Student Stories: LGBTQ+](#)

[IAMAT: LGBTQ+ Travellers](#)

BEING/COMING OUT

Weighing how “out” to be with your classmates, friends, host family, and so on is a personal decision. In other cultures, the act of declaring one’s sexuality may be seen as important, silly, unnecessary, offensive, dangerous, or altogether foreign. Living in a homestay may present an additional set of challenges.

Your “gaydar” will most likely malfunction while you are in your host country. People who you think might be “queer” may not turn out to be, and vice-versa.

SAFETY

Attitudes toward safe sex may vary greatly. Know the risks and play safely at all times. There are times when it is not at all wise to “do as the Romans do.” For example, if men in the host country seem to be casual about condom use, don’t follow suit; always insist on condom use. Drugs and alcohol are notorious for causing lapses in judgment. Also, beware of police entrapment, blackmail, gay bashing, and other possible dangers. Learn the local rules about public displays of affection and what areas are considered relatively safe.

Information For Students With Special Needs

Students with disabilities and special medical, physical, psychological, or dietary needs may also face particular difficulties in the study abroad setting.

Notify your study abroad office and the host institution program coordinator of any special needs you may have. Arrange any necessary steps to ensure your health and safety before you leave the U.S.

If you need accommodation, also consult with the USC Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) well in advance.

Recommended Resources:

[Diversity Abroad: Students with Disabilities Abroad](#)

[Mobility International](#)

[U.S. Department of State: Travelers with Disabilities](#)

[CDC: Travelers with Disabilities](#)

[The Institute for Study Abroad \(IFSA\) Student Stories: Students with Special Accommodations](#)

[International SOS](#)



HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION



USC-Sponsored Travel Health Insurance

USC-Sponsored Travel Health Insurance coverage is mandatory for all students traveling abroad for any reason, except personal travel. Students will be enrolled in the Travel Health Insurance plan once they have committed to their program within the Student Travel Abroad Portal. Students will receive an email from the USC Student Health Insurance Office with their Travel Certification letters which show dates of coverage. Insurance packets will be distributed through the portal. The Travel Health Insurance plan does not provide coverage for routine/preventative services or the management of chronic medical/mental health disorders.

Students may not waive the USC travel health insurance plan when they travel abroad. If students are already enrolled in the regular USC Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP), they will not incur any additional costs for USC-Sponsored Travel Health Insurance coverage. If a student has waived out of SHIP (because they have successfully waived out of the USC Student Health Insurance Plan through the online process on OASIS), they will be charged a supplemental fee for this required coverage, based on the length of their program.

Some foreign countries, foreign universities, or third-party study abroad program providers will require that students purchase insurance that they provide or approve and do not allow students to waive out with USC Overseas or regular insurance. Please contact your study abroad office to confirm that this is the case prior to purchasing.

The insurance carrier that covers students while they study overseas on the USC Student Health Insurance Plan or the USC Overseas Policy is ACE/Chubb. This is accident and sickness insurance, not a comprehensive health care plan. It covers accidents and emergent conditions. It does not cover routine care or management of chronic conditions. This insurance does not cover international students studying in their home country.

The USC Student Health Insurance Plan and Overseas policies work on a reimbursement system, which means you will generally be expected to pay out of pocket for your medical care and prescriptions and then file a claim for reimbursement. There is no deductible for eligible medical expenses. When you submit a claim, you will need to attach all of your medical care receipts. If your receipts are not in U.S. dollars, you must also submit exchange rate information for the dates of service. For information on how to file a claim, please contact the USC Health Insurance Coordinator at 213-740-WELL (9355) or studenthealth@usc.edu.

International SOS Coverage

The USC Sponsored Travel Health Insurance plan includes the services of International SOS (I-SOS), a leading international medical assistance and security services company. Students are advised to contact I-SOS as their “first stop” in pursuing medical care. I-SOS is NOT a care provider, but will assist you in accessing care and managing any “cases” you open with I-SOS.

There are cases in which I-SOS can guarantee payment to the service provider, thus making it unnecessary for the student to pay out of pocket and then file a claim for reimbursement.

Both the USC Student Health Insurance Plan and the USC-Sponsored Travel Health Insurance Plan include important medical assistance and security services (through ISOS) not normally covered under domestic plans.

The total cost for coverage is based on program dates and trip extensions requested in the portal. Students on a semester-long program are given a buffer of 3 days before and after official program dates to account for travel to/from their destination. If students will be traveling before or after their program, be sure to complete the Trip Extension form in their application portal.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE USC OVERSEAS POLICY ONLY COVERS YOU WHILE YOU ARE ABROAD AND ONLY FOR THE DURATION OF THE PROGRAM; it does not provide coverage when you are in the United States or your home country. Before you go abroad you should review the policy plan statement and note the limits of the policy.

Some of your benefits with International SOS include:

- 24-hour access to International SOS physicians who provide emergency and routine medical advice
- 24-hour access to International SOS Global Alarm Centers for medical information, referrals, and emergency assistance
- Medical and dental referrals
- Emergency medical evacuation or evacuation in the case of political or other unrest
- Medically-supervised return
- Case Management
- Medical Expense guarantee and payment --If you are hospitalized, call International SOS and request a guarantee of payment. Please refer to the brochure for a full description of your benefits through International SOS
- Emotional support: short-term counseling sessions by phone or video call

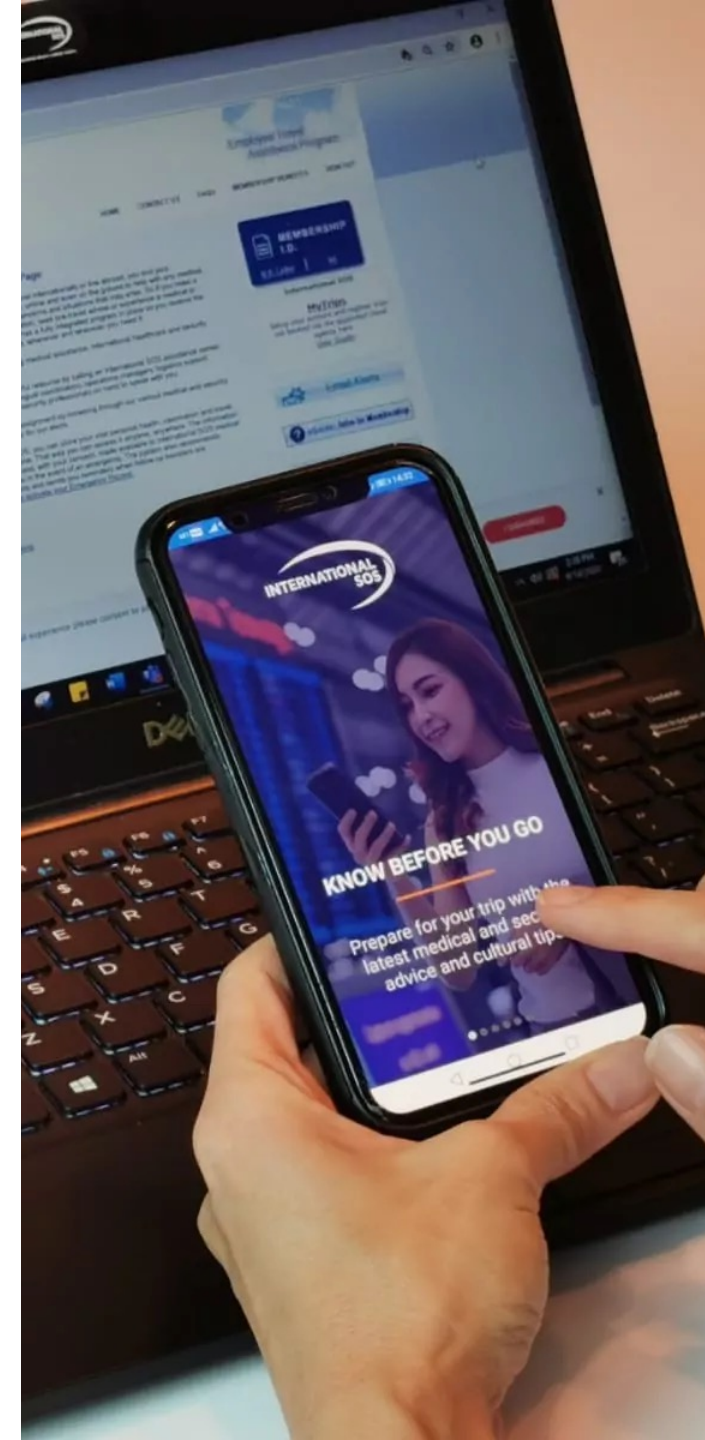
PLEASE NOTE THAT INTERNATIONAL SOS SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE IN PREPARATION FOR AND DURING YOUR PROGRAM ONLY.

The packet you receive will include a Summary of Benefits from the underlying insurance provider for coverage outside the U.S., ACE American Insurance Company/CHUBB. If you are on the USC Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP), you are covered by Aetna while in the U.S. and by ACE American Insurance Company/Chubb while on your educational program outside the U.S. It is important that you become educated about your I-SOS services and insurance coverage while you are abroad. Please note what is covered and excluded.

Please contact the USC Health Insurance Coordinator at 213-740-WELL (9355) or studenthealth@usc.edu if you have questions about your insurance coverage.

What do I do if I get sick or injured?

International SOS will serve as a “first stop” for many of your medical needs. There are some instances in which this may not be the case. In a medical emergency, get help immediately. Contact International SOS first only when doing so will not delay medical attention. If you have a very minor health issue, utilize the student health clinic at your host university or the doctors recommended by your program director. If the issue persists or worsens, you should contact [International SOS](#).



Pre-departure Health and Safety

PRE-DEPARTURE EXAMS

Some programs require medical examinations, immunizations, or a doctor's certification of health prior to students' departures. The USC Health Center can provide these services. Be aware that in the semester of your program, you will not have access to the student health center without paying a special service fee. Before your departure, be sure to get any check-ups (gynecological, dental, vision, etc.) that would fall within the time you are abroad. You should bring the following important health records/ information with you:

- Blood type
- Eyeglass and contact lens prescriptions
- Prescriptions for medications being taken (including the generic name of any prescription drugs)

PRESCRIPTIONS

If you are currently taking prescription medicine, try to bring enough with you for the entire duration of your stay abroad. If your doctor normally prescribes your medication for short periods of time, explain how long you will be living overseas and request an exception. Don't mix different medications in one bottle to save

space in your luggage. Keep medication in the containers they originally came in. Do not stop taking prescribed medication while you are abroad without first checking with your doctor.

Do not plan to ship medications abroad ahead of time or have medication shipped to you.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL CLINIC

The USC International Travel Health Clinic provides students with immunizations, medications, and personalized travel advice. You can make an appointment by calling (213) 740-9355. For more information, visit them online at [USC International Travel Health Clinic](#).

INTERNATIONAL SOS ADVICE AND REFERRALS

Students may call I-SOS to get free advice about taking and obtaining medications abroad as well as referrals to English-speaking care providers. Note that some medications are difficult if not impossible to obtain in certain countries. The USC I-SOS membership gives you access to its website, which provides health and safety information for most countries. Check the I-SOS website regularly and ensure you are up to date on the recommended vaccinations for your specific country.

For your reference, the USC group number you need to access International SOS services is 11BSGCO00010. Their phone number is +1-215-942-8478. You should also download the I-SOS Assistance App to your cell phone.

MANAGING DIABETES AND OTHER CHRONIC ILLNESSES

It is likely that the country you are going to will have available insulin and disposable syringes.

Check availability and prices with the program director or the foreign university's international students' office before you go.

For any other chronic illnesses, it is important to consult with your doctor, USC's International Travel Health Clinic, or International SOS before you go to arrange your care plan while abroad.

IMMUNIZATIONS/VACCINATIONS

Consult the USC Student Health Center and/or the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Regardless of the country you are going to, you should be up-to-date with your tetanus and diphtheria shots and vaccinations. For many countries, it is advisable to get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B before you go.

Staying Healthy Overseas

JET LAG

Jet lag is a real and often unpleasant part of international travel. Our physiological "clocks" are set to Pacific Standard Time, so when we travel to another country in another time zone, our clocks are out of sync with local time.

In order to reset your body's internal clock, you should try to adjust as quickly as possible to your new schedule. Expose yourself to as much sunlight as possible during the first few days, especially in the morning. Make sure to drink plenty of fluids and eat regularly too, but avoid caffeine and alcohol. Being fatigued from jet lag can exacerbate any feelings of homesickness or sadness that you might feel in the first days. Remember that this is a normal reaction.

COMMON TRAVELER'S ILLNESSES

Colds, flu, diarrhea and other gastrointestinal troubles are the most common ailments affecting travelers. Travelers are also at increased risks of hepatitis A, tetanus, malaria, HIV, and more, depending on their location and behavior. Carry a basic first aid kit that includes medications to treat common illnesses such as diarrhea, hay fever or colds. If you suffer from gastrointestinal troubles for more than a few days, you should seek medical attention.

FOOD

Discovering new foods can be one of the great joys of traveling but these new foods can sometimes cause serious illness. Make sure you are informed about what is and what isn't potentially risky. Should you eat uncooked vegetables and fruits? Can you drink the water? Ask your resident director and host family, if appropriate. Especially at the beginning of your stay abroad, err on the side of caution when it comes to eating and drinking. Becoming accustomed to different kinds of food, portions, and meal times always takes some time. If you get sick from anything you eat, please discuss this with the resident director and always follow the precautions suggested by the program regarding food and water.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

If you are in a climate you are not used to, observe how locals dress and do the same. Dressing in layers is important in colder climates, and keeping well-hydrated is especially important in hot climates. Smoking is more prevalent in other countries/cultures outside the

U.S. In addition, air pollution can be a problem to contend with in some cities (e.g. Beijing, Santiago, and Milan). Allergies can crop up unexpectedly when exposed to allergens your body is not equipped to deal with.

If you are used to Los Angeles, with its many days of sunshine, be aware that living in a city with fewer bright days can affect your mood and even contribute to depression.

EATING DISORDERS

Different foods, different levels of physical activity, and the stress of adjusting to a new environment can sometimes lead to or intensify eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Be aware of your eating habits and seek help immediately if you sense a problem. Program personnel, friends and family are people you should consider asking for support. International SOS can refer you to local clinical help and provide emotional support counseling.

If you suspect a friend's health is in serious danger from an eating disorder, please discuss it with them and request outside help if needed.

EXERCISE

Your lifestyle will change dramatically. Make a point of getting regular exercise. If you can't do the same activities you are accustomed to here, join the locals in the sports they enjoy. This is one of the best ways to make friends and integrate into the culture, and it can also be a good way to combat depression.

CREATIVITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Catering to your creative and spiritual needs may also assist in maintaining optimal health. Involving yourself in local creative endeavors and spiritual pursuits can also lead to a stronger connection with the local culture and people.

CULTURE SHOCK AND DEPRESSION

Students studying abroad experience emotional ups and downs and can sometimes feel lonely, homesick, and overwhelmed. These feelings are normal, and some degree of culture shock is an inevitable part of living abroad. Being able to recognize the process of culture shock and the homesickness that accompanies it can make it more bearable. Keeping a journal can really help you recognize your own emotional patterns.

Sometimes homesickness and culture shock can lead to depression. The [USC Counseling Services](#) has prepared the following list of suggested steps to take if you are getting depressed.

These are some simple ways to help you alleviate symptoms while you're waiting for other help or trying to keep things on an even keel. They may not solve the underlying problem but they will provide some relief.

- Use cognitive techniques to get you out of negative thought patterns. For example, “No one cares about me” is a negative thought so try to avoid thinking that way. Besides, it is an inaccurate generalization.
- Try not to over-generalize -- that is, to think in terms of “never” or “always”.
- Plan your day with some activities you have to do and some activities you enjoy.
- Break down difficult tasks into smaller incremental parts.
- Give yourself credit for even the smallest things you get done.
- Get up in the morning and get dressed even when you don't feel like it.



- Get emotional support from a friend, support staff or professional. Talk to an understanding, non-judgmental person for as long as you need to talk.
- Get involved in a fun activity that you enjoy.
- Go to class even when your impulse is to skip it.
- Listen to or help somebody else.
- Use whatever spiritual resources you are comfortable calling on.
- Get some exercise, whatever you can muster.
- Get as much sunlight as possible.
- Eliminate sugar, caffeine, and junk food from your diet. Eat three healthy meals a day.
- Limit use of alcohol.

Above all, if you do start to feel bad while you are overseas, don't keep it to yourself. Although you may be coping well, your classmates and friends may be facing larger challenges. If you notice serious problems, discuss them with your friend(s) and/or the resident director.

MENTAL HEALTH

If you have a history of conditions related to mental health, such as depression, bipolar disorder, attention deficit disorder, anxiety/panic attacks, sleep disorders, etc., it is very important to discuss

your study abroad plans with a mental health professional and your loved ones and develop strategies for managing such conditions should they continue, get worse, or pop up unexpectedly while you are overseas and far from your usual support system. Be sure to take enough of any medications you need, and do not discontinue medications without first consulting with a doctor.

CONTINUING COUNSELING

If you are seeing a counselor on a regular or periodic basis, discuss your study abroad plans with them. If you determine that it is in your best interest to continue seeing a counselor while overseas, inform your counselor of your needs, so they can discuss the necessary arrangements you should make. International SOS and program directors can refer you to English-speaking mental health professionals overseas.

ALCOHOL

Most countries where USC has programs abroad have lower drinking ages than the United States, but they all have very different attitudes toward the consumption of alcohol and public drunkenness. In many cultures, public drunkenness is socially unacceptable. Learning about these attitudes will be part of your cultural adjustment. Sometimes students free from U.S. laws and attitudes toward

alcohol slip into patterns of alcohol abuse while abroad. It is important for you to remember that alcohol and drugs can impair your judgment, especially while you are abroad in unfamiliar surroundings, and can make you that much more vulnerable to unsafe sex, sexual assault, theft, and physical attacks or fights. Alcohol is used by offenders as a tool for incapacitating their victims. The majority of crimes and accidents involving study-abroad students involve the excessive use of alcohol.

OTHER DRUGS

Although alcohol is socially accepted in many countries outside of the United States, the use of other drugs is almost never allowed. In some countries, simple acquisition of prohibited drugs can result in heavy fines, deportation, or prison sentences. While you are abroad you will be subject to all local laws, and these can be very severe when it comes to illegal drugs. It is your responsibility to know what is and what is not legal and you must adhere to the laws of that country.

Marijuana remains illegal in many U.S. states and most other countries. Marijuana derivatives such as CBD oil are illegal in most places where marijuana is illegal. Marijuana is also illegal at U.S. airports, which are under federal jurisdiction.

If you are recovering from an alcohol or other substance abuse problem, you can find meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and other support groups in many countries. Get locations and phone numbers before you go.

You may encounter clubs or other situations where marijuana, hashish, and other drugs such as ecstasy, crystal meth (amphetamine), ketamine, GHB, and the like, are used more openly than you might see in the U.S. The sources of such drugs will be less familiar than any source you may have had in the U.S.; when you purchase or accept such drugs, you do not know exactly what you are getting and don't know whom you can really trust. There have been cases of drugs being slipped into study abroad students' beverages without their knowledge. Some of these drugs are known to sometimes trigger latent psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, etc. It would be especially unwise to take such drugs without thoroughly educating yourself about all the risks involved. Drug dealers have been known to tip off police and get students arrested in hopes of getting a cut of a bribe or police protection. Besides, they are illegal in most countries. If you get arrested with illegal drugs in a foreign country, all the U.S. embassy can do is refer you to English-speaking lawyers and notify your family, and you will be subject to that country's laws and jail conditions.

INTRAVENOUS DRUG USE

In some countries, I.V. drug use among college-age students is more prevalent than in the US. Even if you steer clear of such drugs, remember that having sexual relations with a person using drugs intravenously could expose you to HIV and Hepatitis B and C.

SAFER SEX

Always practice safer sex whether you are at home or abroad. But while you are overseas, being safe and careful in this area takes on a special urgency. Some extra challenges you will face are:

- Using a different language to negotiate and ensure safer sexual practices. You'll find that even in other English-speaking countries, the vocabulary used in relation to sex is quite different from American English.
- Cultural norms and expectations in relation to sex.
- Your own level of judgment and decision-making. It's interesting to note that some students who keep themselves well-guarded in the U.S. can become very careless abroad.
- Availability of information and types of protection.

If you think there is a chance that you will be sexually active while you are abroad, bring protection with you. Some safer sex supplies and contraceptive methods that are easily found here are not always

available in other countries. For example, you may not be able to access certain kinds of implants or shots, certain kinds of birth control pills, "emergency" or "morning after" pills, sponges, reliable condoms, PrEP, etc.

While they do not offer 100% protection against pregnancy, condoms are the easiest form of contraception to obtain around the world. Bottom line: if you have sex overseas, use a condom. Do NOT throw caution to the wind because you are in a totally new environment. Exercise good judgment, and weigh the risks (not just physical, but emotional too) of getting involved with someone overseas.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIS)

Sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) may occur in higher percentages of the population or occur in quite different populations than in the U.S. After abstinence, condoms used properly are the best-known protection from exposure to STIs but cannot prevent all exposure to STIs. Some STIs (e.g. syphilis) can be spread through skin-to-skin contact. Consider getting vaccinated against HPV (human papillomavirus).

HIV, AIDS, AND HEPATITIS B/C

AIDS, caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), breaks down the body's immune system and leads to infections and cancers that may be fatal. Be aware that the HIV virus is present in virtually every country. There are no known vaccines to prevent HIV infection. No one should put himself or herself at risk of contracting HIV.

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person. There is no vaccine for the prevention of HCV infection.

A Hepatitis B vaccine is available. The Hepatitis B virus (HBV) can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. So get vaccinated!

The risk of getting HIV, Hepatitis B/C depends on you. Here are some general precautions you can follow anywhere in the world:

- Avoid contact with others' semen (including "pre-cum"), vaginal secretions, and blood. Either abstain from sexual activity or practice safer sex.
- USE A CONDOM. Men and women should both carry their own condoms.
- Have water-based lubricants available if needed.

- Do not share needles and syringes or use ones that may have been used previously.
- If you need an injection at a hospital, ask to see the needle removed from its original (new) packaging.
- Avoid excessive drug and alcohol use, as intoxication impairs judgment and negotiation skills in sexual situations

Getting tested for HIV in a foreign country can be a scary experience but does not have to be. International SOS or local AIDS organizations can provide information on testing locations, policies, and procedures. If you are currently HIV positive, consult very carefully with your healthcare providers regarding your study abroad plans. Some countries will not issue visas to people with HIV/AIDS.

BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS

Not all countries have mandatory screening of donated blood for the HIV virus. In some locales, ascertaining the availability of HIV-screened blood and blood products may be difficult. Hepatitis C is also transmissible through unscreened blood. Because of obvious uncertainties, consider these precautions: If you are injured or ill while abroad, avoid or postpone any blood transfusion unless it is absolutely necessary. If you do need blood, try to ensure that screened blood is used.

INJECTIONS

In some countries even disposable equipment is reused. In some places, if an injection is required, you can buy needles and syringes and bring them to the hospital for your own use. Avoid injections unless absolutely necessary.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that diabetics or other persons who require routine or frequent injections carry a supply of syringes and needles sufficient to last their stay abroad. But carrying needles and syringes without a prescription may be illegal in some countries. Take a note from your doctor.

TATTOOS

Should you decide to get a tattoo overseas, please make sure that all tattoo instruments are sterile and that the ink supply is fresh and has not been used on someone else.



SECURITY AND SAFETY **ABROAD**



Basic Rules

- You are a guest and should always behave with this fact in mind.
- All student conduct policies listed in The USC Student Handbook apply while you are overseas. This includes the University's policies on alcohol and drug use, as well as sexual misconduct.
- You are still a USC student when you are abroad, even on programs not directly run by USC, and all incidents of misconduct will be reported to the USC Office of Academic Integrity (OAI) or the Office of Community Expectations (OCE).
- The rules and recommendations given by your overseas program are in existence for good reason and are often based on real-life experience.
- Being "foreign" does not excuse you from knowing and obeying the laws of your host country.

General Precautions

- Take good care of your essential documents (passport, tickets, debit/credit cards, etc.). Make photocopies and keep them in a separate location. Use a money pouch and keep your valuables discreet and well-guarded.
- Don't stand out; try to fit in with the surroundings and keep a low profile. One of the stereotypes about Americans is that we are loud! Prove them wrong. Be attentive to how the people of your host country dress and behave in public and in social situations. Integration into the host society is a safety issue.

- Avoid crowds, protest groups, or other potentially volatile situations, as well as restaurants and entertainment places where Americans are known to congregate. While "safety in numbers" is generally a good rule to follow, traveling as a "pack" of American students may attract attention and possibly cause problems.
- Be wary of receiving unexpected packages and stay clear of unattended luggage or parcels in airports, train stations, or other areas of uncontrolled public access.
- Register with the U.S. Dept. of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). You can register your presence with the U.S. Embassy/ Consulates in your host country. Please note STEP enrollment is available to U.S. nationals only. Non-U.S. nationals should register with their home country's equivalent (if available).
- Do not share your address, phone number, or other personal information with strangers.
- Make sure the resident director, host family, or foreign university official who is assigned the responsibility for your welfare always knows where and how to contact you in an emergency. Always give someone your schedule and itinerary if you are traveling, even if only overnight. You can also register any travel outside of your program location through the I-SOS app.
- Develop a plan for regular communication with your family.
- Be streetwise; know where you are going--or at least appear to know. Avoid impairing your judgment through excessive consumption of alcohol or other drugs.

- Have an action plan in mind for various types of emergency situations.
- Use a “buddy system” and never leave a fellow student alone in a questionable situation or state of intoxication.

Emergency Contact Numbers

Know the number to dial in case of an emergency in your host country. Know to whom you should report a crime. Your program’s resident director or university’s international students’ office often provides lists of emergency contacts as well as procedures to follow in various emergency situations. Make sure that you know what these are.

International SOS also provides assistance and services to USC students in security and crisis situations. In the case of a security emergency such as civil unrest, attempted coups or acts of terrorism, International SOS can provide political evacuations, emergency and contingency plans, crisis centers and referrals. The International SOS website and app are great resources for general travel security information and region-specific information. Make sure that you have an I-SOS card on you at all times while you are overseas.

You can find contact information for International SOS on the [USC Emergency Support for Student Travel Abroad](#) website.

Crime

The most common types of crime students experience abroad is theft of personal belongings, often by pickpockets, and fraud. We strongly recommend that you carry your money and bank cards in a money belt while traveling. Always remain extremely vigilant about keeping a close eye on your purse, bags, and pockets.

Cell Phones, Tablets & Small Electronics

“Snatch & run” theft is common in some countries. Always be aware of your surroundings.

Avoid identity theft; keep personal information secured and don’t store personal information on your USB Flash Drives, which are very easy to lose or misplace.

Reporting Crimes and Incidents

Authorities and the general public in other cultures may respond to reported cases of crime and incidents (including sexual assault and harassment) differently than might be expected in the U.S. If you are the victim of a crime, call I-SOS and seek assistance from your study abroad program staff. They may be in a much better position to advise you on dealing with local authorities.

High-Risk Activities

USC-sponsored Travel Health insurance does not cover you if you engage in certain high-risk activities, such as scuba diving, skydiving, bungee jumping, drag racing, whitewater rafting, joining political protests, etc. Read your insurance policy carefully.

Transportation Safety

Traffic-related accidents are the most common cause of injury and death among students who study abroad. Alcohol consumption is often a contributing factor. Among such accidents, many occur while riding on motorcycles or walking across the street. Pedestrians often do not have the right-of-way in many countries, and traffic may flow in the opposite direction than expected.

While it is tempting to rent a motorbike and ride around that Greek isle or Spanish village, realize that the chances of being involved in an accident are quite high. When taking local transportation, including buses, trains, ferries, and domestic flights, always consult with locals about the level of safety. If a bus or van driver is driving erratically or looks intoxicated or overtired, consider getting out and finding alternate means of transport.

Driving in countries where cars drive on the left- hand side of the street is especially dangerous. Those used to driving on the right- hand side may react inappropriately (e.g. pressing the wrong pedal or veering the wrong way) when faced with “close calls” from other drivers or when under stress or fatigue.

Civil and Political Instability

Political demonstrations abroad can sometimes culminate into anti-American demonstrations. Demonstrations anywhere can shift very quickly from peaceful, controlled events to violent chaos. Do not get involved in any social or political unrest or illegal movements, no matter how sympathetic you are with the cause or the people involved.

If a brewing or ongoing situation becomes increasingly dangerous, follow the instructions of the resident program director. Upon arrival in your host country, be sure to register with the nearest U.S. consulate or embassy. If you are not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, register with the embassy or consulate of your country.

U.S. Embassy and Consulate Assistance

The U.S. Embassy or Consulate cannot get you out of jail or out of a legal dispute. The protection of American law and legal procedures does not apply in foreign countries.

SMART TRAVELER ENROLLMENT PROGRAM (STEP)

You are most strongly encouraged to enroll in STEP! The [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) is a free service provided by the

U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in an emergency. STEP also allows Americans residing abroad to get routine information from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. You can enter information on your trip or overseas residence and subscribe to receive updates on Travel Advisories, Travel Alerts, and other information for a particular country.

TRAVEL ADVISORIES AND COUNTRY INFORMATION SHEETS

These U.S. Department of State web publications include information about countries, and areas within countries, where one should avoid traveling as well as public announcements about threats to the safety and security of American travelers. Country-specific

information sheets are available for every country in the world and include the location of the U.S. Embassy in that country, health, crime and security information (including road and transportation safety), currency information and entry regulations and more. The country specific information sheet for your country is the absolute minimum information you should have before traveling abroad. You can find country specific information sheets, public announcements and travel advisories on the U.S. Department of State Website: www.travel.state.gov.

Safety Tips For Women

The following is a list of safety tips for women (and men) everywhere:

- Carry a whistle or an alarm beeper
- When walking, appear confident. Always look as if you know where you're going
- Always be aware of what is happening around you and watch out for potential problems
- Always follow your instincts. If a situation seems unsafe, get out of there as quickly as possible
- Consider the risk of walking alone at night and
- instead, take a taxi, have your friends walk you home, etc.

- If you know you're going to be out late at night, arrange for a ride home beforehand (make arrangements with a friend or taxi company, or carry the phone number for a taxi)
- Never hitchhike or accept a ride from a stranger
- If you suspect that someone is following you and you want to make sure, try crossing the street several times. Go into a public place or find a police officer
- Avoid shortcuts through poorly lit areas and parks.
- Carry your keys in a separate place from your address, preferably in your pocket (in case your purse is lost)

Sexual Assault Risk Reduction

The following is an outline of steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of sexual assault while overseas. Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services at the University of Southern California can provide more detailed information regarding sexual assault risk reduction, as well as post-assault counseling.

The telephone number is +1-213-740-WELL(9355). Visit the [RSVP Office](#) for more information.

Anyone can be a victim of sexual assault. Ninety-nine percent of perpetrators are male regardless of the victim's gender.

While there is no guarantee that a sexual assault will not occur even if you take every precaution, a few safety measures can reduce your risk. Statistics show that most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. It could be a student from another country, a local you've met in a nightclub, coffee shop, or library, or a member of the host family with whom you are staying. The following are ways to reduce the risk of sexual assault and unwanted sexual contact.

These safety precautions are not meant to infringe upon your overseas study experience. They are meant to enhance it. A good resource for personal safety while overseas is the Center for [Global Education SAFETI \(Safety Abroad First Educational Travel Information\)](#) website.

The following are recommended resources to check out:

[“Sexual Harassment and Prevention in College Students Studying Abroad”, by Nancy Newport](#)

[“Personal Safety Overseas: Safety Tips for Overseas Travel, An Update”, by Michael O'Neill](#)

CULTURAL AWARENESS

The “culture” at USC may be quite different from the culture in a foreign country. Here it is not uncommon for males and females to be friends; to share the same dormitories and apartment buildings; to crash on each other’s couches; and to socialize without any sexual expectations. But in some foreign countries, these very things may be interpreted as unintentional invitations or may be exploited by sexual predators. In some cultures, a woman going out in public unescorted by a male could be imagined as a sign she is seeking unsolicited attention. Before you go abroad to study in a foreign country you should familiarize yourself with the local customs surrounding male/female relations. When you arrive you should observe how the locals interact, how they define “personal boundaries”, how the women dress in public, and what is considered appropriate socializing between genders.

SOME AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES

Define Your Personal Boundaries. Personal boundaries are both physical and emotional. You must decide what your boundaries are. For instance, would you allow someone to put their hand on your knee while talking to you? Will you allow them to ask probing questions about your previous or current relationships?

What if someone just seemingly “accidentally” brushes against you? Should you allow a person whom you just met to buy you a drink at a coffee shop, bar, or nightclub? You may want to be more thoughtful about personal boundaries overseas than you would at home.

MAKE CLEAR YOUR PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Be firm and direct. If you are touched in a way you do not like, attempt to remove yourself from the situation. If you choose to say, “I don’t like that. Don’t do it again” and if they do it again, then you should take this as a signal that they do not respect your personal boundaries and remove yourself from the situation. Be conscious of both your body language and your words. Saying “No” with a smile on your face provides a mixed message. Whether overseas or at home predators may test personal boundaries to see what you will allow and escalate inappropriate and criminal behavior as they feel successful.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

If a person or a situation feels “creepy” to you, it probably is. Don’t talk yourself out of how you feel. Don’t say, “Something feels wrong here, but it’s probably just my imagination.” It’s better to go with your gut and get yourself out of the situation.

STAY SOBER

Alcohol and drug consumption are involved in many sexual assaults. Some things you should remember:

- If you drink, only drink with trusted friends who can watch out for you.
- Never accept drinks from strangers.
- Do not leave drinks unattended.
- Go home in a group. Be responsible for each other. Do not leave a friend in a vulnerable position.

SOCIALIZE SAFELY

When socializing or dating in a foreign country, always do some research first. Ask around. Find out what areas of the city or town are considered dangerous. Find out what clubs or bars should be avoided.

MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH FRIENDS

Plan your social activities ahead of time. If you are going out with a stranger or recent acquaintance, leave word with someone about where you are going, with whom you are going, and what time you plan to be back. Bring a cell phone. If there are any changes to your plans, let someone know. If you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation, call a friend and ask them to come and meet you.

KEEP EMERGENCY CONTACTS AT HAND

Always carry International SOS information and any local or international numbers you might need. Have the USC Student Health website bookmarked on your phone/tablet.

Know how to contact the local police and ask for medical assistance in the local language. Know where the closest hospital or health clinic is located. Know how to contact the American Embassy or Consulate.

If you are the victim of a sexual assault during your overseas study experience, contact I-SOS for information regarding your options for medical care, reporting, and counseling. International SOS is also available by phone 24 hours a day to assist with these issues. U.S. Consulates and Embassies' American Citizen Services have 24/7 emergency numbers and staff who can assist you in sexual assault cases. If you are participating in a study abroad program sponsored by another institution, there may be other staff available on-site for immediate assistance or you can call [USC RSVP](#) at +1-213-740-WELL (9355) (after hours, press zero "o" to speak to an on-call counselor).



GETTING THE MOST FROM THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE



Traveler vs. Tourist

(Adapted from the University of Alberta's Education Abroad Handbook)

Before you depart on your adventure, you should consider what kind of visitor you will be and what you will be carrying as baggage.

As a tourist, you take your country with you wherever you go, or at the very least, expect it to be there once you've arrived. You go to see but not to feel. A tourist may even have a light backpack (although that's rare), but the preconceived notions and critical outlook through which the world is filtered are often quite heavy.

As a traveler, you are content to leave it all behind, preferring to call home the place where you hang your proverbial hat. A passport, a credit card, a notebook and a hat are the only burdens of the ideal minimalist traveler. You leave your shopping list, must-see list, travel books, iPod, and all preconceived notions of safety at home.

Rather than make an impact on the world he or she visits, a traveler tries to absorb as much as possible while passing through.

Striking a balance between being a tourist burdened with cultural baggage and a traveler with an empty suitcase is difficult to achieve. But those aren't your only options. You can also become a resident, having the greatest opportunity to absorb a culture and give of yourself to others. If you choose to be a resident, besides

the passport, credit card, notebook, and hat, there are three other essentials that take up no room so long as you bring them, but become a terrible burden if you do not.

First, bring your sense of humor. Without it, you will be doomed to suffer countless maladies, but with it, you'll gain a sense of perspective, and a cure-all for most mishaps.

Second, bring empty space and room to grow, a sort of empty suitcase for your psyche. If you leave yourself open, you will discover new things about your new residence and new things about yourself. Some of the space will fill without you even noticing but sometimes you'll have to make an effort to meet people, try new foods, learn new words, or ask more questions.

Third, bring a sense of self. Don't be afraid to challenge yourself or ask yourself why you believe what you do. You are not a chameleon; some things about yourself are special. Be proud of these things because they make up who you are, no matter where you go.

Finally, be ready to explore new things. The longer your usual ways remain the sole way to fulfill your needs, the more your new residence will seem like a place you'd rather not be. Sometimes it's nice to go away and feel like you've never left home, but ideally living abroad should cause the definition of "home" to grow. If this happens, it's a good indicator that you packed what you needed and left behind what you did not.

Goals and Expectations

Surveys of students who have studied abroad and rated the quality of their experience indicate that those who set specific goals and fine-tuned their expectations along the way had a richer experience.

SETTING GOALS

Just showing up in the host country and going with the flow of attending class and participating in program activities is probably not the best strategy for getting the most out of your experience. Setting concrete goals, and occasionally rethinking your goals, can add some shape to your time abroad.

While goal-setting is a very individual activity, here are some examples from previous study abroad students:

- learning all about the cinema industry in Italy with the hope of eventually working there
- learning how to make Spanish tapas and other dishes such as paella
- making friends with a similar interest in
- political activism and environmental issues
- understanding how manga and anime shape
- the culture of young Japanese
- forming solid friendships and possibly a romantic relationship
- becoming much more fluent in the language of the country
- seeing and understanding how racial and ethnic identity are viewed in the host country
- learning all there is to learn about rugby
- traveling off the beaten path in the host country and seeing things that most tourists don't get to see

How would you go about pursuing the goals listed above or the goals you set for yourself?

FINE-TUNING EXPECTATIONS

As much as we try to embark on new endeavors without building up too many expectations, it's inevitable that we do have expectations of some sort, whether they are conscious or subconscious. It's important to reconsider your expectations when your goals continually seem unreachable to the point of frustration and disappointment.

Be proud of your "baby steps." In the first few weeks, your accomplishments will probably include such lofty tasks as buying a cell phone, riding the subway without getting lost, or exchanging pleasantries with a person at a coffee shop.

Here are some examples of expectations that students often find themselves having to fine-tune:

a) expecting to make friends easily with a lot of locals in the host country.

Making friends with locals in your host country can be challenging. Think about how difficult it might be for a visiting student from another country who does not speak great English to make a circle of good friends during a semester abroad at USC. Would you as a USC student go seek out such an exchange student and try to make friends with them? What kind of effort would that exchange student have to make? Students in other countries tend to already have a close group of friends and don't feel the need to seek new friendships, especially with people who will be around for just four or five months. Making new friends can be difficult, but virtually everyone who has made the effort has said that it was worth it, even if the effort resulted in short-term acquaintances rather than lifelong friendships.

b) expecting the experience to be similar to that of a friend or sibling who has already studied abroad.

You are a unique individual and are responsible for shaping your own experience. If your friend had a great time in a certain city over a certain holiday and highly recommends that you do the same, you may want to caution yourself against expecting the same kind of experience. You may end up having a much worse, or much better, time.

c) *expecting to become fluent in a foreign language.*

One semester is a relatively short time in the process of acquiring a language. While everyone's definition of fluency differs, it is unlikely that a student with two semesters of a language, for example, will attain natively like fluency in just one semester abroad. Rather than get frustrated and give up if not speaking like a local by the third month, the important thing is to stick with the effort to use the language as much as possible and reward yourself for the real progress that you make.

Students sometimes say they want to study in a foreign country because it will "force" them to use the language they have been studying. More likely than not you will be in a program with other American students and will be free to speak English as much as you want outside of class and/or your homestay. Using the language will be a voluntary act that is entirely up to you. Rather than hoping the environment will "force" you to speak, sometimes it's more useful to think of using the language as a process of opening yourself (and your ego) to new opportunities to express yourself and hear what others want to express to you.

BEING OPEN TO DIFFERENCE

Many of the same attitudes that help you appreciate all that a diverse city such as Los Angeles has to offer will help you appreciate and enjoy your time living abroad. Some attitudes and character traits that promote cultural learning are:

- high regard for culture
- eagerness to learn
- desire to make connections
- readiness to give as well as receive
- being curious (vs. passive)
- being secure (vs. guarded)
- being humble (vs. haughty)
- willingness to suspend judgment
- tolerance for ambiguity
- a good sense of humor

We often become excited about entering a different culture but become annoyed once we get there by many of the differences. It helps to be aware of how your own values and ego shape your reactions to the cultural differences you encounter abroad.

RE-ENTRY



Coming home after living abroad may seem like a very simple process; however, “reentry shock” or “reverse culture shock” is common.

Your overseas study experience does not stop once you land on American soil. It would be a shame to compartmentalize your experience in between a definite start and end point. Students who integrate their experience into their life after returning to the U.S. find the effort very rewarding.

The Top Ten Immediate Reentry Challenges

(Adapted from Dr. Bruce LaBrack, School of International Studies, and University of the Pacific)

There are lots of reasons to look forward to going home, but there are also a number of psychological, social and cultural aspects that can prove difficult - often because they are unanticipated.

The following list was generated by interviewing students like you who have been through the experience. They offer the following thoughts on reentry for your consideration.

1. **Boredom**

After all the newness and stimulation of your time abroad, a return to family, friends, and old routines can seem very dull.

2. **“No one wants to hear”**

One thing you can count on upon your return: no one will be as interested in hearing about your adventures and triumphs as you will be in sharing those experiences.

3. **You can't explain**

Even when given a chance to explain all the sights you saw and feelings you had while studying abroad, it is likely that you will become frustrated trying to present them coherently. It is very difficult to convey this kind of experience to people who do not have similar frames of reference or travel backgrounds, no matter how sympathetic they are as listeners.

4. **Reverse “homesickness”**

Just as you probably missed home for a time at the beginning of your stay overseas, it is natural to experience some “reverse” homesickness for the people, places, and things that you grew accustomed to while abroad. To an extent it can be reduced by writing letters, telephoning, and generally keeping in contact, but feelings of loss are an integral part of international sojourns and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural part of study abroad

5. Relationships have changed

It is inevitable that when you return you will notice that some relationships with friends and family will have changed. Just as you have altered some of your ideas and attitudes while you were abroad, the people at home are likely to have experienced some changes as well. Alternatively, you may feel that you have changed a lot and “everything/everyone is the same” at home, which may be disconcerting.

6. People see the “wrong” changes

Sometimes people may concentrate on small alterations in your behavior or ideas and seem threatened or upset by them. Others may ascribe any “bad” traits to the influence of your time abroad. These incidents may be motivated by jealousy, fear, or feelings of superiority or inferiority.

7. People misunderstand

A few people will misinterpret your words and actions in such a way that communication is difficult. For example, what you may have come to think of as humor and ways to show affection or establish conversation may not be seen as wit, but as aggression or “showing off”.

8. Feelings of alienation/critical eyes

Sometimes the reality of being back “home” is not as natural or enjoyable as the place you had constructed as your mental image of “home” while you were overseas. When real daily life is less enjoyable or more demanding than you remembered, it is natural to feel some alienation, see faults you never noticed before in the society around you or even become quite critical of everyone and everything for a time.

9. Inability to apply new knowledge and skills

Many returnees are frustrated by the lack of social opportunities to apply newly gained social, linguistic, and practical coping skills. To avoid ongoing annoyance: adjust to reality as necessary, change what is possible, be creative, be patient, and above all, use all of the cross-cultural adjustment skills you acquired abroad to assist your own reentry.

10. Loss or compartmentalization of experience

Being home, coupled with the pressures of job, family, and friends, often combine to worry returnees that somehow they will “lose” the experience, as if their experiences will become compartmentalized like souvenirs or photo albums and only occasionally taken out and looked at. You do not have to let that happen. Maintain your contacts. Talk to people who have had experiences similar to yours. Practice your skills. Remember and honor the hard work and all of the fun that you had while you were overseas.

RESOURCES



USC Campus Contacts & Resources

The [USC website](#) has direct links to OASIS, the current Schedule of Classes, Course Catalog, the Faculty/Staff Directory, and more. Many of your questions can be answered through these resources. If possible, please start by consulting these resources.

If you are not able to get an answer, please direct your inquiries to the appropriate contact person listed below. Please allow a minimum of three days for a response.

Questions about the Program, Registration, or Billing: E-mail your study abroad advisor.

Questions about Academic Advisement: E-mail your major or minor adviser with a “cc” to your study abroad adviser.

Questions about Housing: E-mail housing@usc.edu and “cc” your study abroad office.

Questions about Financial Aid: E-mail the Financial Aid Office through the [“Contact Us”](#) page.

Important note: If you do not receive a response within a week, please re-send your message (with the proper “cc”) and request a confirmation.

Travel Abroad Resources

Please visit the websites listed below and search for the country/countries to which you will be traveling. These sites provide valuable country information, as well as up-to-date travel advisories and risk ratings for each country.

Please note: Links to external sites are intended to be informational and do not have the endorsement of the University of Southern California. These sites may also not be accessible to persons with disabilities.

[U.S. Department of State](#)

[Bureau of Consular Affairs](#)

Travel warnings and announcements, travel publications, lists of doctors/hospitals abroad, Medevac/medical insurance.

[U.S. Embassy](#)

[Department of State for Study Abroad](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

Information Concerning Destinations, Outbreaks, Diseases, Vaccinations, Traveling with Children, Special Needs Travelers, Cruise Ships, and Air Travel.

[Yellow Book, Health Information for International Travel](#)

Vaccination Information; Yellow Fever Vaccine Requirements and Information on Malaria Risk and Chloroquine Resistance, By Country; Specific Recommendations for Vaccinations and Disease Prevention; Health Hints for the International Traveler; Geographic Distribution of Potential Health Hazards to Travelers.

[World Health Organization](#)

[International Travel and Health](#)

Find information about the risks to which travelers are exposed and the precautions needed to protect their health. Access information by a map or country list. Includes disease maps and checklists for travelers.

[Countries](#)

Indicators and disease outbreak information (including disease outbreak news) organized by country name.

Helpful Websites

ATM LOCATORS

<http://www.visa.com/atmlocator>

TRAVEL GUIDE WEBSITES:

[Lonely Planet: Guidebooks, Country Information, Maps & Budget Travel Resources](#)

[National Geographic: Maps, Country Information](#)

[Rick Steves: "Through the Backdoor" Guidebooks & Travel Resources](#)

[Atlademia: Maps & Country Information](#)

[Insight Guides: Travel guides](#)

[Let's Go!: Guidebooks & budget travel resources](#)

[Timeout: City Guides -- Local Entertainment Calendars & Information](#)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Many newspapers and magazines around the world are now online. They are a great way to brush up on your language skills and learn what's going on in the place where you will spend a semester or year. It also gives you lots of material for conversing in your host country.

[International Newspapers](#)

[International Radio Stations](#)

CURRENCY CONVERSION

<http://www.xe.com>

<http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic>

LANGUAGE LEARNING & PRACTICE

The Language Center on the 3rd floor of Taper Hall, has a wide range of resources. There are also weekly language tables for several languages taught at USC.

You may also consider downloading Google Translate on your phone to use in a pinch. Apps like DuoLingo can also be helpful as you prepare for your time abroad.

Lonely Planet Phrasebooks:

These phrasebooks include lots of practical, everyday language you may not have learned in your language classes.

FICTION

Get works of fiction by writers in your host country or set in your host country. Reading such works of fiction is a great way to pass the time on an airplane, train, or bus.

Student Identity & Experiences

We hope that the resources below help to provide with knowledge to help navigate intersecting identities as you prepare for your time abroad. [Diversity Abroad](#) has a broad range of Diversity and Inclusion Resource Guides available online.

[Diversity Abroad: Managing Mental Health While Abroad](#)

[First Generation Students Abroad](#)

[Heritage Seekers Abroad](#)

[LGBTQ + Students Abroad](#)

[Racial & Ethnic Minority Abroad](#)

[Religious Diversity Abroad](#)

[Students with Disabilities Abroad](#)

[Women Abroad](#)