



# **A Student Guide to Study Abroad**

By

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INSTITUTE OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
EDUCATION

**New York**



IIE publications can be purchased at: [www.iiebooks.org](http://www.iiebooks.org)

The Institute of International Education  
809 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017

© 2013 by the Institute of International Education  
All rights reserved. Published 2013  
Printed in the United States of America  
ISBN-13: 978-0-87206-361-7

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Berdan, Stacie Nevadomski.

A student's guide to study abroad / by Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, Dr. Allan Goodman, IIE President and CEO, Sir Cyril Taylor, AIFS Founder and Chairman.  
pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-87206-361-7 (alk. paper)

1. Foreign study--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. College students--Travel--Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Title.

LB2376.B47 2013

370.116'2--dc23

2013020771

The views expressed in these chapters are solely those of the authors.  
They do not necessarily represent the official positions of the  
Institute of International Education or the AIFS Foundation.

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Jacket Design: HDN Studio, Inc.

Text Design: Pat Scully Design



# A Student Guide to Study Abroad

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# Acknowledgments

This book is part of the Global Education Research Reports series, a joint effort of IIE and the AIFS Foundation to explore the most pressing and under-researched issues affecting international education policy today. Though many books have been written on the topic of study abroad, few provide in-depth explanations of all the considerations students must make before choosing a program. This book gives students and parents the tools they need to understand the implications and benefits of an international educational experience.

We would like to begin by thanking all the U.S. higher education institutions and leaders who make study abroad a priority, as well as the U.S. and foreign governments, private foundations, and other organizations who so generously provide scholarships and grants for American students to study abroad. In particular, the Fulbright Fellowship and Gilman Scholarship Programs of the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Boren Scholarships and Fellowships of the National Security Education Program have made valuable international experiences possible for thousands of American students—including many of those quoted in this book.

We are grateful to the IIE communications and Center for International Partnerships teams, especially Daniel Obst and Sharon Witherell, for guiding this project from inception to publishing, and to the AIFS Foundation, especially Bill Gertz and Melanie French, for their generous support and advice.

The IIE study abroad experts who work on the Gilman, Boren and Fulbright Scholarship and Fellowship programs, especially Daniel Kramer, Christopher Powers, Susan Sharp, Sarah Gleisner, Michelle Pickard and Lindsay Calvert, provided excellent substantive context as well as contacts with students who have taken part in the programs.

We could not have written this book without the contributions of many people who are quoted throughout the text. Those who studied abroad and offered their thoughtful insight, reflections of their experiences, and willingness to share their stories made the book much richer in texture and quality: Morgan Abate, Cindy Banyai,



Jackie Barber, Taurean Barnwell, Taylor Binnix, Leslie Briggs, Darigg C. Brown, Kenneth Buff, Jessica Chesbro, Greg Chocheles, Beth Cubanski, Eamon Devine, Maya deVries, Natasha F.C. Diamond, Daniel Erchick, Arie Farnam, Isabelle Feldhaus, Eric Fischer, Shirah Foy, Ashley Gaona, Rachel Garaghty, April R. Gillens, Ivan Gonzales, Leah Goodridge, Kim Gordon, Elise Hannon, Brian Hardin, Claire Harrison, David Haury, Kristin Hoobler Morgan, Hope Johnson, Caroline Hicks, Robert Hurtekant, Garrett Langdon, Nicole Lawson, Anna Lippard, Mandie Maxwell, Perseus McDaniel, Jeanette Miranda, Victoria Mita, Nate Nault, Heather Nelson, Amy Newman, Marikaa Nixon, Caity O'Shaughnessy, Benjamin Pauker, Yasamin Ebrahimi Rahmani, Violeta A. Rosales, Bryan Rozycki, Daniel Schlemovitz, Caroline Siska, Crescendo Smalls, Christy Smith, Megan Smith, Jeremiah Swisher, Amarylis Velez-Perez, Cody White, Peter D.A. Wood, and Benjamin, Melissa, Stephanie and Susannah who requested that their last names not be used.

The business leaders and academics validated the content by providing quotes and anecdotes that enhanced the text: Frank Abate, division manager, JM&A Group; Marty Abbott, executive director of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL); Nicholas Bassey, placement manager, Peace Corps, and former director, Institute for International Public Policy Fellowship Program; Harold Burson, founding chairman, Burson-Marsteller; Nancy Cave, coordinator, Study Abroad Program, Manhattan College; Curtis S. Chin, former U.S. Ambassador to the Asian Development Bank and managing director, RiverPeak Group, LLC; Steve Finikiotis, principal & founder of Osprey; Bruce La Brack, professor emeritus, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific; Adam Michaels, principal, Booz & Co.; Steve Miranda, managing director, Cornell University Center for Advanced HR Studies; Eduardo J. Padrón, president, Miami Dade College; Donald L. Rubin, professor emeritus of communication studies and language and literacy education and research director, GLOSSARI, University of Georgia; John Sexton, president, New York University; Susan Sample, associate professor, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific; Susan Sygall, CEO and co-founder, Mobility International USA; Raghuram Tadepalli, dean and professor of marketing, Martha and Spencer Love School of Business, Elon University; and the Delaware Valley Re-Entry Conference Committee (John Duncan, Terra Dotta; Alayne Frymoyer, Philadelphia University; Jonathan Hakim, University of Pennsylvania; Marcia Henisz, Drexel University; Sara Lynott, Temple University; Lezlie McCabe,



Temple University; Ahaji Schreffler, Drexel University; Danielle Scugoza, University of Pennsylvania; Rachel Tarlecky, Arcadia University; Nicholas Wagner, Drexel University; and Amanda Zimmerman, Arcadia University).

And for those who are not quoted but provided important information: Lynne Tarter, director of solutions, TMC | A Berlitz Company, for information on culture shock; Cerise Roth-Vinson, chief operating officer, Mobility International USA, for information on persons with disabilities.

Particular thanks to Marshall S. Berdan, whose thoughtful comments and superb editing skills made the book a significantly better read; to Shepherd Laughlin for his careful and helpful proofreading; and to Shannon Harrison, Barbara Taff and Madeline Friedman at IIE for their contributions in design and production. Thanks also to Morgan Abate who played a significant role in researching elements of the book and providing a college freshman's expectations of both the content and the writing style. Special thanks to those who read the manuscript: Hannah Cole, Beth Cubanski, Benjamin Pauker and Rebecca Weiner. Their individual and collective feedback made the book's structure, flow and content much stronger.

Thanks also to Pat Scully Design for design and layout of the book and to HDN Studio, Inc. for the jacket design.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to the hundreds of students who took the Study Abroad Survey, enabling us to gather and share information in real time about recent study abroad experiences. Thanks also to the many professors, college administrators, and study abroad advisers who took the time to discuss the merits of this book and how best for us to advise today's students considering studying abroad.







## Foreword

Every student who wants to succeed in the global economy should study abroad. It is one of the most valuable things you can do for yourself and your career. Each of us has lived and worked both in the United States and overseas, working extensively with both students and employers in a variety of business, academic and not-for-profit settings in our own careers.

Stacie Nevadomski Berdan is a seasoned global executive, an expert on international careers, and an award-winning author on how to succeed in the global marketplace. Sir Cyril Taylor has been an innovator in study abroad for nearly 50 years, having founded the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) in 1964, and Richmond, The American International University in London in 1972. As the president and CEO of the Institute of International Education, Allan Goodman is a leader in creating and expanding international educational exchange opportunities, and making them more accessible to more diverse student populations. He was previously a professor and the executive dean of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, teaching students who are now in diplomatic leadership positions around the globe. Together, we and our organizations have advised and supported hundreds of thousands of students over the years to gain an international experience, and we continue to advocate for more students going abroad.

We have seen firsthand the value of making international a part of one's education and of listening to others when it comes to adapting to life in another country. We have all felt culture shock and also re-entry problems, and we have seen the impact of an international experience on those who have been fortunate enough to have one. But we realize that not every student knows where to start and how to make it happen. So we teamed up to reach students like you, who are still exploring whether and how to study abroad, and wondering if they should do it. The answer is a resounding "yes"—but only after you have prepared yourself to take full advantage of the opportunity.

We wrote this book to give every student access to the best information available on study abroad—things to know before you go, how to make the most of your



time abroad, why you should consider internships and career-related experiences abroad, how to transition back to life in the States, and, as you embark on your career, how to use study abroad to showcase your global growth and learning.

To bring you current, relevant advice, we surveyed approximately 350 students and asked dozens of educators and business leaders to share their insights. In addition to our own best advice from years of working in international education and communications, we aim to offer you timely and practical feedback from the current generation of students who have made the most of their time abroad. Therefore, we have included more than 200 real-life stories from a diverse collection of students, advisers and professionals, as well as 100 easy-to-follow tips to help guide you through the process.

The wide range of programs currently available makes study abroad more flexible, affordable and accessible than ever before. While not everyone can go abroad for a full year in a total language immersion setting, we hope you will agree after reading this book that there is a study abroad option for everyone. We urge you to make international a part of your education.

Stacie Nevadomski Berdan

Dr. Allan E. Goodman

Sir Cyril Taylor GBE

CHAPTER 1

## These are Global Times

As you have no doubt noticed, globalization is everywhere and the professional world that awaits you upon graduation is becoming increasingly interconnected. In addition, technology continues to advance by leaps and bounds. Not surprisingly then, employers increasingly seek workers who have both cross-cultural competence and cutting-edge technical skills, 21st century skills that, unfortunately, are still not an integral part of the K–12 U.S. education system. What’s worse, you may not have had the opportunity to acquire or practice these skills in college. So what’s a student to do to prepare for the global marketplace? One of the best ways is to study abroad.

Studying abroad expands your personal horizons while opening up a world of personal and professional opportunities. Students who are true global thinkers may already be planning to study abroad. For those who are just getting curious about the big world out there, studying and interning abroad are well worth exploring. One of the most important life skills you’ll gain from studying abroad is cross-cultural aptitude, the ability to appreciate different cultures and solve problems while operating in an environment different from what you’re used to. You will find that cross-cultural competency matters as much in the communities where we live as in the offices in which we work. Globalization means that wherever we live, we are likely to share our schools, communities, neighborhoods, clubs and faiths with people from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

Study abroad also enables you to further your language skills, especially if you opt for true immersion—where everything is done in the target language—and study or do an internship abroad for a significant length of time. Studies show that at least one semester is required to advance significantly, and exponential progress can be made in one year (Davidson, 2010). The benefits of truly mastering a second language are self-evident. Not only can you communicate more closely with speakers of that language, you can also better understand that culture, since language and culture are invariably intertwined. Conversing in another language can help you connect with locals on their level, and you may even find yourself thinking or dreaming in their language. Even if you don't speak another language fluently, just being around others who do will open your mind.

Studies also show that learning a foreign language makes you smarter and improves your proficiency in your mother tongue. Neuroscience continues to reveal how language learning shapes memories, perceptions, and basic thought patterns (NEA Research, 2007). The quote traditionally attributed to Charlemagne sums it up best: “To have a second language is to have a second soul.”

Whatever you think personally about the desirability of globalization, everyone agrees that it is here to stay, and all of us—especially you as students—will do well to accept and embrace it. Employers certainly already have. As a driver of career success, global experience is destined to continue moving from “nice” to “must-have” in today's marketplace. Many would say that it is there already.

## **Global Competition for Jobs and Necessary Preparation**

A half century ago, American businesses were the undisputed kings of the international business hill, a position that they had “inherited” largely as a consequence of having won World War II. Today, however, there can be no denying that they face fierce competition from an increasing number of global rivals. One major report makes clear the now-critical need for a globally sophisticated workforce: “Globalization is driving the demand for a U.S. workforce that possesses knowledge of other countries and cultures and is competent in languages other than English ... Most of the growth potential for U.S. businesses lies in overseas markets [while] our own markets are facing greater competition from

foreign-owned firms, many of which manufacture products on U.S. soil” (Kibler & Philipse). The U.S. Department of State and the Department of Defense have promoted and developed programs to encourage language learning and international study. The U.S. Department of Education recently issued a policy on *Succeeding Globally Through International Education and Engagement*, and noted that the department “wants to ensure that more American students have the skills to compete in a global workplace, and not just build up ‘deep, deep expertise’ among a small group of graduates in foreign languages or cultures” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). To date, however, such calls to better prepare the rising generation of American workers have not been followed up by much action or K–12 curriculum changes.

But changes are coming. PricewaterhouseCoopers predicts that by 2050, the E7 (China, India, Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, Mexico and Turkey) will be more than 50 percent larger than the G7 countries (the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan) when measured by GDP at market exchange rates.

The National Intelligence Council’s “Global Trends Report” projects that China will surpass the United States as the world’s largest economy by 2030 (National Intelligence Council, 2012), but other reports show China doing so a decade earlier by 2020. The media is already widely reporting on American graduates heading to India and China to find work; you may even know someone who has done so or plan to do so yourself. Unfortunately, those jobs may soon evaporate since both those countries are investing heavily in their educational systems while the United States remains mired in political debates about ours. This is frightening when you consider that your competition has grown from just American students to students from Beijing or Bangalore (Bikson & Law, 1994; Committee for Economic Development, 2006; Molony & Sowter, 2011). Today’s constants seem to include both ever-closer global integration and ever-accelerating change. But are today’s graduates prepared to handle the challenges that globalization poses? Do you feel prepared to compete on a global scale?

Right now, the competition appears to be getting tougher for American graduates as not enough of them possess the skills and aptitudes required by global organizations. Such deficiencies could hamper your ability to find a job when you graduate. One executive quoted in a Rand Institute study called American students “strong technically” but cross-culturally “shortchanged” and “linguistically deprived.”

Another said “if I wanted to recruit people who are both technically skilled and culturally aware, I wouldn’t even waste my time looking on American college campuses” (cited in Committee for Economic Development, 2006).

The ability to work across cultures is no longer a nice-to-have skill set for elite executives; every year it becomes more essential to finding any job at all. A machine operator at a plant in Topeka that exports widgets to Mumbai needs to know how to interact effectively when Indian customers visit. A nurse’s aide at a Houston hospital that serves a large Hispanic community has to communicate with family members in ways that encourage rather than discourage patient compliance with doctor’s orders. A farmer in western Pennsylvania can open up potentially rich new revenue streams by understanding exactly what qualities in American ginseng will appeal to the Korean market. The examples go on and on.

A recent Forbes Insight survey found that more than one-third of the executives surveyed plan to hire more foreign nationals in the coming years for executive positions in the United States (Forbes Insights, 2011). A McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) study found that worldwide, 40 percent of job growth in advanced market economies like the United States in the coming decades is likely to go to foreign nationals. And while some Americans are finding jobs abroad, those without global skills and experience will find they have fewer and fewer opportunities. One survey of more than 10,000 HR and recruiting personnel worldwide found that most insist that job candidates have international study experience, especially at the executive level. The MGI study found that more than 20 million Americans without postsecondary education or specialized training may find no jobs at all in the years to come (Madgavkar et al, 2012).

International skills are not only needed in business settings. Above all, learning another language and culture reminds Americans that we are not alone. We share the world and its problems, and we cannot solve them all on our own. Global problems require the global exchange of knowledge to forge solutions through international dialogue and collaboration. Study abroad enables today’s students—future leaders from all backgrounds and in all sectors—to gain access to international experiences that will help prepare them to be global citizens. Learning how to interact with people from other countries and cultures will be essential for those who wish to address a host of urgent topics and issues—from climate change and renewable energy to terrorism and interfaith dialogue—that

are essential to advancing peace and prosperity for all. Whether you wish to work in business, government, academia or in the not-for-profit sector, the skills you gain will help you to be more effective and successful.

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FROM A BUSINESS LEADER

*As a 35-year-old, I believe that my generation is the last one to be able to use global experience as a differentiator. Globalization has now become a requirement to compete and succeed.*

— Adam L. Michaels, principal, Booz and Company.

## Savvy Students Know They Need More

By now, the alarm bells may have begun to go off in your mind. Your ability to work globally and cross-culturally may make the difference between a satisfying career of progressive successes, and a struggle to succeed. Thankfully, though, studies show that younger Americans like you are already embracing the necessity of global awareness. According to a September 2012 study of 18- to 24-year-old American high school graduates, commissioned by the education nonprofit World Savvy with support from the International Baccalaureate Organization, young people want to learn more about global topics:

- 80 percent of those surveyed believe that **jobs are becoming increasingly international** in nature.
- 60 percent say they would be better employees if they had a **better understanding of different world cultures**.
- 86 percent agree that a **solid foundation in world history and events** is crucial in coming up with **solutions to the problems** of the world today.
- Nearly 90 percent believe that **developments abroad** can have significant **implications on the U.S. economy**.
- 79 percent say that it is important in today's world to be **comfortable interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds**, a percentage essentially equal to the perceived importance of writing skills (78 percent), technical skills (76 percent) and math skills (77 percent).

Respondents noted, however, that global issues are not routinely discussed in school:

- While the vast majority of respondents see the importance of global literacy, 48 percent actively disagree with the statement that their 6th–12th grade education provided instruction that helped them understand the roots of those global issues that affect their lives today.
- 63 percent indicated that they did not discuss world events in their high school classes.
- Only a little more than half (54 percent) think that their high school teachers incorporated a global perspective into their curricula.

Several major U.S. government programs help students gain international experience: the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program and the Fulbright U. S. Student Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Boren Scholarships and Fellowships sponsored by the National Security Education Program. For more on the Gilman, Fulbright and Boren programs, see Chapter 4.

## Developing a Global Mindset

So perhaps you haven't been taught everything you need to know yet. The good news is that you still have time to help yourself. Regardless of where you are currently on the continuum of global awareness, study abroad can help you develop that all-important global mindset. Ask academics, business professionals or government officials to describe "global mindset" and most will offer a similar definition: the ability to work successfully across cultures (though not necessarily in another country). Experts disagree, however, as to what makes one person better prepared than another and whether or not a global mindset can actually be taught. Having a global mindset requires not only possessing the technical skills necessary for operating successfully in an international environment, but also the personal skills necessary for applying these effectively.



At the most basic level, having a global mindset means having the skills that are proven to work cross-culturally. Although these traits appear to be inherent in some people, they also can be learned. So if you're serious about going global, start practicing these skills in personal and professional situations now. You'll find that while these skills will inevitably prove to be critical to success abroad, they can also help you succeed here at home. In the global marketplace, technical skills are necessary but not sufficient. As a 21st century global worker—in addition to your technical or industry skills—you will need cultural sensitivity, the ability to interpret situations, information and facts while being an empathetic and diplomatic team player, and a passionate curiosity that lets you enjoy the cultural diversity you live with-in to bring out the best in you and your colleagues. Such skills may prove to be an important way to differentiate yourself professionally. And study abroad is one very important component of this preparation.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*In Panama, I learned a lot about coral reef ecosystems. But I also learned that many important scientific research findings never reach a broad audience. Yet, interacting with Panamanians at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's Galeta Marine Laboratory and with the community through its active program of marine education forced me to find concrete connections between the public and my academic research. The Fulbright Program encourages its participants to engage in cross-cultural exchange and direct involvement with local communities. This focus taught me how to bridge the gap between local Panamanians and academics so that their communities could benefit from the valuable scientific research generated in their country.*

— Maya deVries, University of California, Berkeley. Awarded a Fulbright to Panama.

## Global Times Require Global Study

In order to prepare you to meet the demands of the increasingly global marketplace upon graduation, studying abroad should be an essential component of many undergraduate degrees—and mandatory for MBAs. Today's students need as much international exposure as they can get, but what can students do when they are first starting out? It can be difficult to convince employers of your ability to think globally if you don't have international experience.

Studying abroad is a smart way to establish your international credentials, and more and more American students are spending a portion of their college years abroad. The Institute of International Education's *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*, which is produced in partnership with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, reports that U.S. study abroad has more than tripled in the past two decades.

But the number is still far too low. American students studying abroad still represent a small proportion of total enrollment in U.S. higher education. About 14 percent of American students receiving bachelor's degrees have studied abroad at some point during their undergraduate programs, and more community colleges are offering study abroad options as well. Still, only about one percent of U.S. students are studying abroad during a single academic year—less than 300,000 out of the more than nearly 20 million American students enrolled in U.S. higher education. The upside, at least for now, is that if you study abroad you are part of the special group that can offer some degree of international experience upon graduation. This can help you stand out when looking for a job.

Despite an increase in the overall number of students taking part in study abroad, the proportion of African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students in the study abroad population has remained virtually the same over the past decade. About 78 percent of study abroad students are white, according to the latest *Open Doors* report, although whites represent 62 percent of enrollment in higher education. Asian Americans represent 8 percent of study abroad students, which is close to their actual proportion of all college students. However, African-American students comprise 14 percent of the college population, but only 5 percent of study abroad students. Hispanic students make up 13 percent of all those enrolled in U.S. higher education, but only 7 percent of those who study abroad.

## GLOBAL MINDSET INVENTORY (GMI)

Much of the ongoing research on global mindset is being led by Thunderbird School of Global Management in Glendale, Arizona. Its rigorous, scientific study of the drivers of expat success has shown that a global mindset crosses professions and countries. In its report, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Global Mindset®: Development of the Global Mindset Inventory* (Hough & Bullough, 2011), the Thunderbird Global Mindset Institute's team identifies the three components of a global mindset:

- **Intellectual capital:** Defined as knowledge of global industry and competitors and measured by knowledge of global business savvy, cognitive complexity, and cosmopolitan outlook. Do you have both the knowledge of global industries and the ability to understand complex global issues to get the job done?
- **Social capital:** Involves building trusting relationships and is measured by intercultural empathy, interpersonal impact, and diplomacy. Do you have the ability to work well with colleagues who are different from you in order to inspire productivity?
- **Psychological capital:** Reflects and is measured by one's passion for diversity, quest for adventure, and self-assurance. Deep down, are you curious about the world enough to explore and respect other cultures, and to interact and collaborate with them?

When it comes to traveling overseas, many students focus on the reasons *not* to go. According to college administrators, concern about affordability tops the list of reasons students decide not to study abroad. But additional barriers include fear of racism, worries about delayed graduation, and few role models—either family or faculty—who have traveled abroad. Most administrators agree that increasing racial and ethnic diversity in study abroad will require an effort to persuade students that going abroad is both possible and necessary.

Since 2001, congress has helped address the disparity with the federally funded Gilman International Scholarship Program, which provides study abroad funds for low-income Pell Grant recipients. Among last year's Gilman scholars, 54 percent reported ethnicities other than white/non-Hispanic, compared to 21 percent of the national study abroad population as reported in *Open Doors*. African-American students and Hispanic students were represented among Gilman scholars in proportions that were much more reflective of their representation in the total U.S. higher education population.

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*I began the process to apply for the Gilman Scholarship because I really needed the financial support for travel expenses and living abroad. As I learned more about it, I liked the program in particular because it forced me to make decisions that integrated my goals with my country and program of choice. This ultimately gave more meaning to my study abroad experience in terms of my own personal, academic, and professional development. As a result, my study abroad semester was not only an amazing cross-cultural experience, but also a strong basis for my chosen career path in global health.*

— Isabelle Feldhaus, University of Southern California. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in South Africa.

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**FROM AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION LEADER**

*During my years advising minority students about studying abroad, I shared a perspective that applies no matter what a student's ethnic or socioeconomic background may be. In a society that is technologically interdependent and interconnected, the ability to connect with people who are different (and think differently) from you, and learn from the interaction, is a critical skill for which today's employers are looking. When a person makes the decision to remove herself from her comfort zone, from all she holds dear, and charts her course in new territories, the personal and intercultural growth gained translates into tangible, solid skills. From a selfishly practical perspective, having a meaningful study abroad experience on your résumé is a tremendous asset. Minority students must include study abroad in their college plans to ensure that they have just as much a competitive advantage during their future career searches as anyone else.*

— Nicholas Bassey, placement manager, Peace Corps; former director, Institute for International Public Policy Fellowship Program.

## Students with Disabilities Focus on Abilities Abroad

Many colleges do not track the ability status of their education abroad participants. But among those that do, 4.1 percent of study abroad students had disabilities in 2010/11. It can be done! While many people with disabilities are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of international exchange, there are so few role models that many people with disabilities believe that international travel is not possible for them. Going abroad gives people with disabilities the opportunity to develop important professional skills, as well as other skills equally important to finding a career, such as problem-solving, resiliency and confidence. International exchange experience can counter negative stereotypes about what people with disabilities can and can't do, focusing employers on abilities instead of disabilities.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*International travel seems much more accessible to me now; virtually all of the apprehension I had about traveling as someone with a disability evaporated and I feel very strongly about encouraging others like me to do it. Most of the resistance I encountered came from people who saw my disability as an impossible barrier to travel in a developing country, whereas I just saw it as a challenge.*

— Rachel Garaghty, who has muscular dystrophy and uses a power wheelchair, University of Minnesota. Studied abroad as a graduate student in Tanzania.

There are some excellent resources available. Mobility International USA (MIUSA) and the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, provide technical advice and expertise on international exchange to people with disabilities and can provide information on a wide range of issues related to disability, ranging from accessibility and funding to advocacy and arranging for disability accommodations. Students with disabilities face all of the same issues noted above and then some.

## What and Where Can You Study?

Over the past few years, there has been a tremendous expansion in the number and variety of programs that are available. Now there is most likely a program that is right for every student. Historically, most study abroad programs embraced the humanities. But more colleges are now offering or even requiring an international stint for students of social science, business, fine or applied arts, and engineering. All subjects can be taught through a global lens, and students in every field will benefit from a global perspective.

### Fields of study of U.S. study abroad students, 2000/01 and 2010/11

Field of study	2000/01	2010/11
Social sciences	20.3	22.9
Business & management	18.1	20.5
Humanities	14.5	11.3
Fine or applied arts	8.5	8.2
Physical or life sciences	7.1	7.9
Foreign languages	8.2	5.6
Health professions	3.2	5.3
Education	4.4	4.2
Engineering	2.7	3.5
Math or computer science	2.0	1.8
Agriculture	1.6	1.3
Undeclared	4.5	2.7
Other	4.9	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>154,168</b>	<b>273,996</b>

Source: Open Doors 2012

Destinations for study abroad also continue to expand and adapt to changes in the global marketplace. We believe study abroad programs will continue to change as the global economic and political landscape continues to evolve.

Over the past decade the number of U.S. students studying abroad has increased by 78 percent, growing from close to 155,000 students in 2000/01 to nearly 275,000 in 2010/11. European countries have remained the predominant study destinations for U.S. students, but there have been some notable shifts toward non-European destinations. A decade ago, 63 percent of U.S. study abroad students selected European destinations, but most recently that proportion dropped to 55 percent. While the absolute number of students studying in the top European countries has continued to grow, the proportion of U.S. students selecting those destinations has decreased. For example, the proportion of U.S. students going to study in the UK has fallen from 20 percent of all study abroad students in 2000/01 to 12 percent in 2010/11.

Conversely, the proportion of U.S. study abroad students selecting Asian destinations has grown, from only 6 percent of U.S. study abroad students a decade ago to 12 percent in the most recent *Open Doors* report. China, the fifth most popular destination overall and the leading Asian destination, showed a particularly dramatic increase, hosting almost five times as many U.S. study abroad students in 2010/11 (14,596 students) than it did in 2000/01 (2,492 students). India has also become a popular destination for U.S. study abroad students, ranking as the 11th most popular host destination in 2010/11. In contrast to the gradual growth of students going to China, the number of U.S. study abroad students in India has increased 62 percent in just a few years, growing from 2,690 students in 2008/09 to 4,345 in 2010/11.

There has been modest growth in the number of U.S. study abroad students going to Africa, as well as a diversification of study abroad destinations in Latin America. In 2000/01, just 3 percent (4,471 students) of U.S. study abroad students studied in Africa, compared to 5 percent (13,974 students) in 2010/11. The proportion of U.S. study abroad students in Latin America has remained relatively steady over the past decade, but students have gone to more diverse destinations within the region. In 2000/01, Costa Rica and Mexico were the only Latin American countries among the top study abroad destinations, but by 2010/11, Argentina and Brazil had also entered the top 15 study abroad destinations for U.S. students.

These changes are very good for all students considering study abroad today and in the coming years because students will be better prepared to address shared global issues. If you're looking for an opportunity to transition from study abroad into a job, you would be well advised to consider studying in a rising global economy with strong GDP growth. Nongovernmental organizations, entrepreneurs, and foreign investment dollars are all flocking to emerging markets for a variety of reasons including their growing consumer market potential, natural resources, development and infrastructure, ecotourism development, technology advancement and environmental issues. Experience gained abroad in one of these destinations as an undergraduate will definitely give you an advantage later on as a job-seeker.

## Why Study Abroad?

You've probably heard returning study abroad students rave about their experiences and offer advice: "It changed my life!" "It was the best experience ever!" "Don't just think about it, do it!" These are the three most common open-ended responses we received as part of our research with approximately 350 respondents who had recently studied abroad, and whose responses we will continue to reference throughout this book. The vast majority of students surveyed offered one, two or all three of these statements in their responses. Most students say that their experience abroad was one of the most significant aspects of their higher education.

Pushing yourself to get out of your comfort zone and experience another culture and education system in person is what makes studying abroad such a meaningful and enlightening event. You shouldn't consider it to be a tangential or separate part of your college education, but instead an integral part of it. And this includes studying content that will offer you a broader perspective, including taking an international marketing class in Paris, studying chemical engineering in Mumbai, or researching public policy in Cairo. International experiences such as these can enhance your life academically, socially, culturally, personally and professionally. Keep in mind, though, that "the best experience of your life" is not guaranteed to be all fun and games. Some of the best growth experiences come from mistakes and lessons learned. That doesn't diminish the value of the experience—it enhances it. Just don't expect study abroad to be easy.



## Make the Most of Your Education

With the right preparation, the classes you take while studying abroad will count as credit toward your degree. Moreover, you will generally have ample opportunity to take classes that are not offered at your home campus. Plus, while you are abroad, you'll discover learning in a new way, as the higher education systems of other countries differ greatly from those of the United States. This means that you'll experience a different approach to teaching, learning, assignments and homework. Working through these differences will prepare you to work with colleagues, supervisors and clients who come from different backgrounds. If you study abroad, you'll have the added benefit of a "minor" in international experience as part of your academic achievements.

After studying abroad, most students never view their education in the same way again. The experience is so powerful, it often influences subsequent educational endeavors, including the decision to pursue higher degrees. Study abroad students return home with a reinvigorated interest in academic pursuits and a renewed passion for lifelong learning. Moreover, studying abroad forces you to take a break from traditional campus life and equips you with real-life, hands-on skills that no classroom can match.

Studies show the best way to gain proficiency in a second language is to have no choice but to use it (the way babies learn). Taking classes in a second language, not in English, provides an indispensable benefit for students who wish to master that particular language. That's why many foreign language majors are required to study in a country where that language is spoken. Becoming proficient in a language is one of the top reasons students have studied abroad for decades.

### FROM A BUSINESS LEADER

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*In today's increasingly competitive world and workplace, the skills and knowledge gained from studying abroad can be critical steps forward in the race to get that first job or promotion. Studying abroad, whether in Beijing or Rio, can set you apart and more importantly help set you on the path to success. If you wonder whether studying abroad is it worth it, put aside your worries. The right program—and not all are equal—can deliver the "3 C's": competitive advantage, career growth, and cross-cultural success.*

— Curtis S. Chin, former U.S. ambassador to the Asian Development Bank and managing director, RiverPeak Group, LLC.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I thought I would learn Arabic, conduct some research, and learn more about the Moroccan lifestyle, but it has been so much more. I achieved my original language goals, published a piece on Morocco in a foreign policy magazine, and sought out all the opportunities to immerse myself in the Moroccan culture and way of life. Perhaps more than anything, I made meaningful personal and professional relationships with people in North Africa that I will take with me for the rest of my life.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

## Expand Your Cross-Cultural Horizons

When you study abroad, you will be brought into close, everyday contact not only with American classmates on your program, but also with classmates from other countries, and with hundreds of students from your host country. Some of the personal friendships you will make will last for years. They might even be the beginning of a global network that eventually leads to job prospects. Living and studying overseas inevitably fosters a sense of teamwork, as the group you live or study with becomes closer as you collectively experience the challenges of a multicultural situation. On the other end of the spectrum, you will also learn to depend more upon yourself. When push comes to shove, you will have to be the one proactively asking questions and soliciting help.

The cultural benefits of studying abroad are obvious. Spending time in a foreign country can't help but open your eyes to the wider world, especially to different ways of going about everyday human activities. You'll have a much more expansive definition of "different." You may learn that people pray differently and to different gods and on different days. You'll meet people who shake hands, bow or kiss each other on the cheek to say hello. You'll find that bathrooms can be different, that concepts of "being on time" can vary widely, and that the foods some people eat can seem really strange. You will learn that there are grains of truth in some stereotypes, but also that many are inaccurate and potentially harmful.

You'll probably laugh at others' perceptions of Americans and feel compelled to communicate "the truth" about your own culture. As a result, you will probably become

both more reflective about U.S. culture and what that culture has instilled in you, and increasingly appreciative of what other cultures have to offer. Paradoxically, you'll also learn that people around the world are more alike than different. This openness to different approaches should make you a better problem-solver and team player. For more on this topic, check out Chapter 6.

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#### FROM A BUSINESS LEADER

*The ability to understand and relate to people in other countries the world over is based upon two things: competency in their language and a knowledge of—and sensitivity to—their culture. Of the two, I believe the latter is the more important. Foreigners are usually forgiven when they fail to be fluent in the language, but they are considered ignorant or insensitive when they are unaware or scornful of the culture. The fact that hundreds of thousands of American students now spend a significant portion of their college or post-graduate years studying abroad is a heartening development in the direction of a better understanding and rapport among the many diverse populations spanning the globe. There's no better way to learn the customs and mores of a country than by living there for an extended period of time and immersing yourself in daily life.*

— Harold Burson, founding chairman, Burson-Marsteller.

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#### FROM A STUDENT

*My study abroad experience helped me to better understand my biases and views about various aspects of health and its related risk factors. The lens through which I viewed individual and population health was colored by the social, political, and economic climate of my American surroundings. My views about health were sometimes drastically different from the realities of people living in South Africa. I quickly realized that I had to allow their experiences and environment define what health meant to them so that I could better understand how to approach the existing disparities in a culturally appropriate, unbiased way. This way of thinking is important in my career and the research I am involved in because it transcends populations, geographies, and cultural norms. Public health research requires understanding different “ways of knowing” when it comes to engaging communities, assessing situations, developing strategies, and evaluating results.*

— Darigg C. Brown, Pennsylvania State University. Studied abroad as Boren Fellow in South Africa.

## Experience Personal Growth and Development

By immersing yourself in a new culture and experiencing new ways of thinking, you will inevitably undergo personal growth. Most students return home not only with expanded ideas about other people and cultures, but also with new perspectives on themselves. You may find yourself questioning your lifelong personal beliefs and values, which may lead you to either strengthen or abandon them. You will also develop more self-awareness and self-confidence as you rise to the challenge of mastering a whole range of new situations. Navigating the subway system in a new city may not seem like a big deal—but wait until you have to do it using foreign currency, interpreting route maps and schedules that are not in English, and, quite possibly, having to ask for help from strangers. By the time you've successfully arrived at your destination, you'll feel as though you've conquered a mountain! Experiences like these not only make you feel good about yourself, they also result in an improved sense of maturity and independence. This can-do confidence is critical to future success, both in life and especially in the workplace.

Travel, always an enriching experience, expands the mind. But international travel can often be difficult and expensive to organize from home. For financial or other reasons, not every study abroad student seizes the opportunity for extra travel while overseas. But such travel is much easier and cheaper if you are already living in another country. While studying abroad, you should have many opportunities to take interesting excursions, whether for a few days in the immediate area or for longer visits that may be a plane ride away. The adventures you'll go on and the life experiences that you'll have will enhance your studies and add a new dimension to your time on the ground.

### FROM A BUSINESS LEADER

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*The beauty of studying abroad is gaining a broader understanding of other cultures. Having access to other people and building relationships with those people on their home turf enables one to think more creatively and flexibly—necessary skills in today's competitive work environment. If a student can bring that understanding and knowledge back to the U.S., the sky's the limit!*

— Frank Abate, division manager, JM&A Group.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*My experiences abroad have forced me to give up any pretense of control over external forces. As a result, I'm flexible, easy-going, carry low expectations but high ambitions, and can't wait for the next unexpected adventure. I carry a knowledge that life's not fair and isn't always convenient, but a firm conviction that I can learn from every experience, and that no journey is wasted.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

## Enhance Your Career Opportunities

Study abroad is one of the best ways—and is often the only way—for a student to acquire marketable international qualifications and cross-cultural competency, two of the most critical skills for workers today, prior to graduation. But there is more to studying abroad than just picking up and leaving the country. You need to plan carefully and select both the type of program and destination that is right for you. We encourage you to make the most of the opportunity by selecting the country where you can best improve your language skills, or a nontraditional location in an emerging market.

Increasingly, employers seek workers who can speak another language (or two) and who understand other cultures. For students who are contemplating careers in international business, foreign relations and diplomacy, studying abroad is almost imperative. But for all future job seekers, certain soft skills—especially communication, analytical abilities, teamwork and flexibility—are highly prized, and studying abroad is an excellent way to develop them.

We also urge you to think about global issues that you are passionate about or areas where you can make a difference, and do some research on what countries and cultures would best prepare you for work in the fields that interest you.

## FROM A BUSINESS LEADER

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*With the rate of globalization increasing on a daily basis, today's leaders are perpetually bombarded by a dizzying number of economic, organizational and market challenges. Those individuals who take the steps to expose*

*themselves early in their careers to the different ways countries and societies think about these challenges have a greater ability to understand global context. As such, they will have a significant competitive advantage over those who choose the more traditional domestic path.*

— Steve Miranda, managing director, Cornell University Center for Advanced HR Studies.

#### FROM A STUDENT

*During an interview for what is now my current job, my interviewer referenced and was intrigued by my time abroad and specifically my language skills. I can't say that is why I got the job, but I do know that it made a positive impression.*

— Claire Harrison, University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Studied abroad in Italy.



#### QUICK TIP

***Many professionals reported that the demands of their workplaces have required them to learn new skills and new languages and adapt to complex issues.***

You will need to take some steps to be sure you are getting the most out of your international experience. First, be sure to connect the skills and the overall experience you gain during study abroad to your on-campus learning—both prior to departure and upon reentry. Second, make sure these newly learned skills or characteristics can be applied in the workforce. And when you get back, highlight them clearly on your résumé, with compelling examples provided during the course of a job interview, to show that you know how to make it relevant to a potential employer and apply it while working on a cross-cultural virtual team in the future. Third, be prepared to appreciate and communicate your experience in a way that your prospective employer will appreciate. Don't simply leave it to employers to make the connections. You must illustrate your experience and explain what

transferable skills you've learned and how you can adapt them to the workplace. For detailed information on leveraging study abroad in your future pursuits, check out Chapter 10 for tips and example from others.

Approaching its 50 year anniversary in 2014, AIFS surveyed alumni who participated in study abroad programs between 1990 and 2010 and who are now in their 20s to late 30s, to find out how alumni regard the impact of their student abroad experience on their lives. Specific focus was paid to the areas of cultural understanding and world view, professional and career development, and personal growth and values (AIFS, 2013). Eighty percent of the nearly 1,600 respondents indicated that study abroad contributed to their ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments.

## What Value Does Study Abroad Offer Employers?

What do companies value most from a study abroad experience? Based on conversations we've had with employers at many large multinational companies and global organizations, the one quality they value most is the inherent curiosity common to students who have chosen to study abroad. Such people are presumed to be already on the track to becoming globally minded and globally competent employees. The vast majority of professionals we interviewed agreed that if two applicants have essentially equal résumés, they would hire the one who had studied abroad. The following attributes were cited:

- Cross-cultural awareness, which is critical to diverse global teams.
- Ability to bring global thinking skills to bear on complex issues.
- Language skills needed in a multilingual world.
- Predisposition to and experience with global mobility.

But whereas study abroad in general might have been sufficient even a decade ago, the location where you studied is now increasingly important in helping you stand out. Eschewing the typical Western European countries in favor of China, Brazil, Russia, South Africa or India signals an enhanced awareness of a growing global economy, and often helps students forge a direct link with the very places where many companies are expanding. Moreover, these nontraditional destinations often offer more challenging situations for a student accustomed to U.S. culture, thus intensifying the learning curve.

In any case, would-be employees shouldn't expect companies to just tick the box of international experience and move on. Overseas experience typically precipitates a whole line of questioning during the interview process. Organizations will want to know what you did and learned and how you can bring that international experience to bear on the job. Was the experience a rigorous one with a full academic load—or was it primarily just a working vacation? If your three months in Rome, for example, was mostly spent sipping cappuccino and tooling around on a Vespa, then the experience offers little to interest a prospective employer. Were any of your classes in the local language? Was an internship part of the term? If a student studied and took classes in Spanish in Madrid, Arabic in Cairo, or Japanese in Osaka, while also learning to navigate the culture as evidenced by a part-time job, tutoring at a local school, or serving as a docent at a local museum or historic site, employers will be significantly impressed.

In order to reap the full benefits of studying abroad, you must immerse yourself in the local culture. Taking stand-alone classes in English taught by American professors without a strong cultural component is no longer enough. Universities and colleges are catching on to the need to integrate the global experience into their academic curricula, and those changes are serving their students well in their careers. In fact, students who enjoy a rich cross-cultural experience often end up at the top of a company's fiercely competitive list for future international transfers. Rigorous overseas stints have proven to catapult many a career. You can read many of these stories in Stacie Berdan's award-winning book, *Get Ahead By Going Abroad*.

### **Study Abroad Students are Better Prepared for the Workplace**

In 2000, researchers began an ambitious effort to document the academic outcomes of study abroad across the 35 institutions in the University System of Georgia. The data included 283,000 students at 425 study abroad programs of all types (exchange/immersion, faculty-led, short-term, etc.) at research universities, comprehensives, and both two-year and four-year schools. Ten years later, they found that students who studied abroad had improved academic performance upon returning to their home campus, higher graduation rates, and improved knowledge of cultural practices and context compared to students in control groups. They also found that studying abroad helps, rather than hinders, the academic performance of at-risk students.



Some of the more interesting findings showed a significant increase in functional knowledge among study abroad students when compared to the control group. Some of the indicators used to determine this finding include:

- Knows how to compare and contrast culture.
- Knows norms and taboos.
- Knows how to give coherent directions.
- Knows how to talk way out of tough situation.
- Knows different ways to express ideas.
- Knows what's funny.
- Knows how to take a train or a bus to reach a destination.
- Knows how to pacify an angry person.

This information is interesting because **these are life skills**. Not necessarily language fluency achievements or geography knowledge, but functional skills that are difficult to teach in a classroom and best learned through experience. These are important skills for building cross-cultural interaction. In fact, knowledge of cultural context also improved significantly over the control group:

- Knows how different settings affect one's own style of interacting.
- Understands significance of language and culture differences.
- Knows how cultural settings affect one's own reactions to and interactions with others.

All of these skills will enhance your ability to be a better worker, whether you are working in the United States or abroad. More and more hiring managers have begun to make the connection between study abroad and the enhanced skills they need.

Research also shows that graduation rates for students who studied abroad are significantly higher than those of their stay-at-home peers:

- Four-year graduation rates of study abroad students are 17.8 percent higher.
- Five-year graduation rates of study abroad students are 10.6 percent higher.

- Six-year graduation rates of study abroad students are 6.4 percent higher.

Moreover, the effects hold consistently across sub-groups of gender, income, race, and SAT scores. The outcomes of this research are published in *Documenting the Academic Impact of Study Abroad: Final Report of the GLOSSARI Project*, a 2010 report by Richard C. Sutton and Donald L. Rubin.

## TODAY'S STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Study abroad programs can vary widely, so it pays to do your research. Some have rigid curriculum requirements; others are so flexible that even freshmen, just beginning their college experience, can participate. Some are more like glorified vacations, with every logistical detail taken care of, while others take self-sufficiency to extremes by requiring participants to find their own accommodations after arrival—an intimidating enough prospect even for seasoned travelers. Some are academically rich, others mediocre. The cost and quality of programs can be extremely uneven. Therefore, prospective participants must be discerning buyers, seeking out those programs best designed to help them meet their own specific academic goals.

Many colleges offer short stints abroad, which may last two or three weeks, as part of a class. These can be a good way to get a first international experience, and they provide important options for students who could not otherwise go abroad due to work or family commitments. However, although a short time abroad is better than no time abroad, we believe that study abroad should be longer whenever possible in order to maximize your learning. It takes a while to get the feel for things on the ground in a new place. Often, by the time you feel comfortable and are ready to be truly productive, it is already time to leave. We urge you do your best to go abroad as long as possible—and as many times as possible.

In the chapters that follow, we will be presenting a wealth of information about each step of the study abroad process, beginning with how to determine if study abroad is right for you (Chapter 2), and ending with some advice on how to leverage your international experience to further your career (Chapter 10).

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# TOP TIPS

## Top 10 Reasons to Study Abroad

1. *Learn about yourself and become more self-aware.*
2. *Boost your self-confidence and independence.*
3. *Learn another language.*
4. *Learn about your own country.*
5. *Expand your worldview.*
6. *Strengthen adaptability, communications and team-building skills.*
7. *Enhance your career opportunities.*
8. *Experience another culture firsthand and enhance your cross-cultural competency.*
9. *Make new friends from around the world.*
10. *Travel.*

CHAPTER 2

## Determining if Study Abroad is Right for You

For most college students in their first and second years, the allure of studying abroad can be intoxicating. That is because students tend to initially focus on the “abroad” part, a word that conjures up any number of romantic personal impressions—often, in fact, little more than fantasies—based on movies, travel books, and firsthand reports from friends and relatives who have vacationed abroad. Eclipsed by the glamour and intrigue of it all is the “study” part.

But make no mistake about it: studying abroad is a serious undertaking. It will challenge you on a personal level. It will have an impact on your academic career. And it will cost money. Deciding whether to go abroad, therefore, is a momentous decision, and not one that should be made quickly or without a thorough assessment of all the pros and cons. In order for you to make the right decision, you will need to take a deep, practical look at the personal, academic and financial challenges of study abroad.

**Study abroad challenges you on a personal level.** In Chapter 1 we touched upon the personal growth and development that inevitably occurs as a result of studying abroad: increased self-awareness, independence, self-confidence, team- and relationship-building skills, adaptability, and an overall sense of accomplishment. But how exactly does this happen? Studying abroad is more than just getting to your class on time, making yourself understood in the local language, and eating

different foods at the cafeteria. You must learn how to do many new things while also relearning some things that have become second nature. Study abroad involves a subtle but important change in your expectations of yourself and others. More importantly, you will have to cope with a loss of identity and familiarity and get along without some of the longstanding touchstones that provide encouragement, meaning and direction. You will definitely grow personally, but the experience will test you. It's important to determine beforehand that you are up to the challenge.

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#### FROM AN EDUCATOR

*Students, even those who have traveled abroad for tourism or business, benefit greatly from studying abroad. Being able to see and experience a foreign culture in the company of one's peers is not only educational but can also be an eye-opening experience. The sights, smells, sounds, language, mannerisms and behaviors that are experienced open up one's mind and make the students realize how much more there is to learn from going abroad.*

— Raghuram Tadepalli, dean and professor of marketing, Martha and Spencer Love School of Business, Elon University.

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#### FROM A STUDENT

*Experiencing another country/culture was the main reason I decided to study abroad. I wanted to become proficient in another language so badly that I made it my major, but I was also interested in Spanish culture and traveling. At first glance, my study abroad experience didn't seem to meet my expectations at all, mostly because I thought adjusting to the culture would be easier than it was, and it turned out that living in Costa Rica didn't suit me at all. However, once I changed my expectations, I realized that I had gotten exactly what I was looking for, because, happy or not, I was experiencing another country and its culture, and the personal growth I gained from learning to like where I was living was what made the experience worth it in the end.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

**Studying abroad will have an impact on your academic career.** The main reason that you are in college is to earn a degree, one that will hopefully prepare you for a satisfying and rewarding career path. How will studying abroad affect that objective? For some students, it can greatly contribute to reaching it; for others, it may have little to do with academic goals, or even present some obstacles. But make no mistake, study abroad is just that: taking classes at an overseas or foreign university. The experience shouldn't be viewed as an extended vacation or a lightweight academic term. You should not only come ready to put just as much effort into your studies as you do on your home campus, but also be prepared to put in even more, especially if you are going to be studying in another language.

But all this work won't go unrewarded. Most students enjoy their classes, and say that the experience ignited their interest in academic pursuits in general. Many return home with a renewed academic purpose and the desire to do even better in their coursework. If done intelligently, studying abroad will enhance your overall undergraduate experience. But to be sure it does, you will need to map out how it contributes to your overall course of study before you leave.

To do this requires two things: 1) finding out whether your university or college requires you to complete any courses before you study abroad, and 2) making sure you will have enough time after returning to campus to complete all of your graduation requirements on schedule. This means not waiting until the term before you are thinking about going overseas to find out the facts—start investigating in your freshman year. Failure to do this could result in unpleasant consequences. You could, for example, find that a certain required course that you could have taken before you went abroad is not offered the term you return, which could delay your graduation. Alternatively, you could discover that studying abroad is no longer even an option since you didn't meet a certain prerequisite.

To stay on track to graduate on time, you will also need to make sure that your study abroad credits are completely transferable. We will cover this topic in more detail later in this chapter. With that said, there are students who find the experience so valuable that they are not overly concerned about transferring credits.

## FROM AN EDUCATOR

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*You may use your time abroad to delve deeper into your major, or you may use it to explore entirely new fields of study. Whatever you choose, stretch yourself. Play another octave of the piano. Connect to the culture you are in. Make it your goal to seek out and truly consider perspectives different from your own—to move beyond the window you were given and view the world through the many facets of a diamond—from politics to the way communities function to the role of food in society. Then strive to maintain these new ways of seeing when you return home. That way, your time abroad will not only enrich your academic career, but also the rest of your life.*

— John Sexton, president, New York University.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I knew that I could not afford to take a semester off to study anything but my major, so I began to research study abroad programs that focused on business. Luckily, my university had created a business program at Sciences Po in Paris that intertwined French culture with finance, marketing and human resources. I was able to keep my credits on track, while still getting the full abroad experience.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.

*I graduated in three and a half years while spending a full year studying abroad! Many people will tell you that studying abroad will delay graduation. While this could be true, I would encourage any current student to seriously research the program they are looking into and see what exactly their graduation timeline will look like. If you are a freshman or sophomore, start planning your classes for the next few years and figure out how study abroad will fit in!*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.



In addition to preparing for study abroad prior to leaving, you will also need to think about reintegrating back into life at your U.S. campus upon your return. Read more on this topic in Chapter 8.

**Study abroad costs money.** Studying abroad certainly isn't cheap, but neither does it have to break the bank. The cost of studying abroad varies greatly depending on the type and location of the program, the length of the stay, and whether the program is administered through your university or an outside organization. And while the overall cost of studying abroad often exceeds that of studying on the home campus—which may lead the student to consider it unaffordable—it is a mistake to assume that is the case, or to assume that the margin of difference is prohibitively large. Some study abroad programs—especially those in developing countries—can actually be less expensive than tuition and fees for the equivalent amount of time on your home campus. Moreover, financial aid, scholarships and grants are often available to qualifying students.

In an effort to encourage more students to go abroad, many colleges and universities are committed to maintaining cost parity; in other words, a semester abroad should cost exactly the same as one on the home campus, at least as far as tuition and board. Others offer vouchers that can be used to help defray the costs of airfare, meals and in-country travel, since these costs are often unpredictable and vary widely depending on the destination country. Food and transportation in Italy, for example, will be significantly more expensive than in Guatemala. In any case, you will want to have extra money to spend on worthwhile activities and excursions, such as attending cultural performances in China, buying a Eurail pass to explore the capitals of Europe from your base in Paris, taking a side trip to the Amazon from your base in São Paulo, or exploring the savannah while in Africa. So while the total cost may prevent you from participating in your ideal study abroad program, it probably won't prevent you from going at all. But it will be up to you to make it happen.

#### FROM AN EDUCATOR

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*Study abroad is a wonderful opportunity for any student. To be removed from your regular routine and parachute into a new geography and culture with brand new people and personalities is a mandate for learning. For many community college students, however, access to such experiences is limited*

*given the costs. Miami Dade College has established shorter-term faculty-led experiences that range from two to four weeks that cut the costs in half. We are hopeful that additional grant money from private and public funding sources will make this valuable experience available to many more students.*

— Eduardo J. Padrón, president, Miami Dade College.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Look for programs through “reciprocal exchange.” In this type of program, you pay the tuition you normally would at your U.S. college, and any credit earned abroad may be counted as “in-residence” toward your graduation requirements. All of my scholarships at my U.S. college were applicable to my study abroad experience because it was through reciprocal exchange.*

— Nicole Lawson, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Ireland.

*I had to raise money to support my study abroad because the cost of my program was a few thousands of dollars higher than the cost of attendance at my home university. I applied for scholarships and other support as well. It takes time to plan for a successful study abroad experience.*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.  
Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.

But what if you're still not certain that the benefits that you will reap from studying abroad will be worth the cost? Incomplete and misleading information keeps many students from even considering studying abroad. Too many students mistakenly believe that there is no place in their academic plan for time abroad, or that study abroad is just a luxury that they can neither afford nor benefit from.

## Why Do People Study Abroad?

Ask almost anyone who has studied abroad about their experience, and they will say it was a life-changing opportunity and one of the most rewarding things they have ever done. Ask these same individuals why they went, however, and the answers will be much more diverse. According to our survey of approximately 350 students who had studied abroad in the past five years, the top three reasons cited for studying abroad are:

**Experience another culture/country: 92%**

**Travel: 89%**

**Personal growth: 83%**

Secondary reasons include:

**Career prospects and marketability: 44%**

**Learn a language: 30%**

**Recommendation from a friend/peer: 23%**

**Major or career requirement: 18%**

Source: Study Abroad Survey 2013

### FROM A STUDENT

*“It’s hard to know what you want to do in this world if you’ve never seen it.” This is a personal philosophy that I discovered after returning to the States from my year studying abroad in Scotland. Previous to that year, I had lived under the assumption that I should always know exactly what I want to do and exactly what direction I needed to go in life—even though I really had no clue. As a matter of fact, during my sophomore year, I was so afraid of falling behind and not getting a high-paying job when I graduated college that I was applying for internships and jobs that I really didn’t want. While both the UK and the rest of Europe are pretty Western, the mere act of getting outside of the U.S. for a year opened my eyes to different cultures, different people, and different ways of life. In the end, I discovered a whole new “world” of opportunities, and I’m glad I can still take advantage of these opportunities because I didn’t make a rash decision during my senior year of college.*

— Nate Nault, College of the Holy Cross. Studied abroad in Scotland.  
Spending a postgraduate gap year in China.

## FROM A STUDENT

*My main reason for wanting to study abroad was to travel. I had no idea that in just three short months overseas I would learn so much about myself. It's an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. I gained the confidence of knowing that I really could survive on my own. This newfound confidence led me to move to South Korea, a country where I didn't know anyone and didn't speak the language, to teach English for two years, a year after graduating.*

— Caroline Hicks, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

*As a senior I was more focused on what I wanted to do, which was to immerse myself in the Spanish culture. My goal was to become a Spaniard and maximize my time in Spain so that I could advance my language acquisition and gain more of an appreciation for the European way of life.*

— Crescendo Smalls, Wagner College. Studied abroad in Spain.

## Is Study Abroad Right for You?

You will need to depart ready and open to experiencing the international lifestyle. Some students—and their parents—may have doubts about studying abroad. You may not be sure if you're ready to spend six months in another country struggling through a second language. You might be concerned about leaving a boyfriend, girlfriend, or groups of friends you've recently made. Perhaps you think it will interfere with your coursework for your major, possibly postponing your graduation date. Maybe you've never traveled internationally before.

Only you can tell if you have the curiosity, openness and interest to successfully study abroad. Picking up and moving to another country for a semester or a year requires a good deal of research, thoughtful planning, and honest self-assessment. We'll cover the first two points throughout this book, but you've got to make the third assessment on your own. To be sure, no one knows you as well as you know yourself. But perhaps you would like some guidance in helping determine if you're prime study abroad material? If so, get ready to take a short quiz that has been adapted from *Go Global! Launching an International Career Here or Abroad* (Berdan, 2011).

### Quiz: Is Study Abroad Right for You?

For the following statements, give yourself an honest “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” on whether you agree with the following statements:

- I thrive on challenges—the more the better.
- I enjoy meeting and getting to know new people.
- I love new places, new foods and new cultures.
- I can get along with many different personalities, including those others find difficult.
- I thrive on change, and am happy to be surrounded by it 24/7.
- I enjoy taking calculated risks.
- I don't get bothered by things that seem different or strange.
- I don't mind being alone.
- I go the extra mile—time and again—without being asked.
- I thrive when asked to go outside my comfort zone.
- I am curious about what makes the world go round.
- I am adaptable.
- I am a good listener and communicator.
- I like working in teams.
- I can handle failure and learn from it.

**Scoring:** If you answered yes to 12 out of 15, you may have a bright global future ahead of you. If you answered yes to 10 out of 15, you have the makings of a good internationalist, and a guide to those areas where you need to do some improving. If you said yes to about half, you should think seriously about what kind of study abroad program will best meet your needs and help you to evolve. If you answered yes to less than five, you need to consider why you want to study abroad and perhaps do a little extra preparation so you are ready to adjust to your new surroundings.

Just because your score is low, however, doesn't necessarily mean you shouldn't study abroad. But it does mean that you should carefully assess the program and

your desired outcomes. The real secret to a successful study abroad experience is to learn, and to integrate that learning into your personal growth and apply it to your professional self. And keep in mind that scores on assessments like this one tend to change over time, especially as the individual's pathway through life becomes molded by real-life experience. The fact that you're reading this book shows a curiosity that can be built on!

## Assessing Your Situation and Taking Stock of Your Needs

In addition to determining if studying abroad is a good educational, cultural and emotional fit for you, it's highly beneficial to determine the kind of study abroad program that is likely to suit you best. Fortunately, there are many more options than there were just 20 years ago when, generally speaking, you either participated in your school's established study abroad program or you just didn't go. The flip side of that, of course, is that the abundance of choices available today can seem overwhelming. But if you begin your decision-making process with a prioritized list of criteria, you should be able to narrow the options down to manageable levels. Here's a list of questions to get you started.

- 1. What do you want to study?** It could be your major subject, it could be the native language, or it could be simply to help meet diversification requirements in a creative and intriguing way. And, of course, it could be a combination. You should also consider whether it is important to you to have opportunities to conduct research in your field, or to take part in internship or service learning activities while you are there.
- 2. How important is it that you earn credit for studying abroad?** In light of the total financial outlay of studying abroad, the vast majority of students want to receive at least some academic credit for their time and effort. But not all need to receive a full term or semester's worth. So what is the minimum number of credits you will need to receive to stay on track for graduation?
- 3. Where do you want to study, and why?** Is there a specific country or region that interests you, perhaps one that you would want to return to work and live in after graduation? Is there a specific language you want to work on?

Is there a part of the world that you are exceptionally curious about and can't wait to begin exploring? The answers to some of these questions can effectively narrow your search for an appropriate study abroad program. For example, if you want to study classical Greek architecture or Incan history, you're pretty much going to end up in Greece or Peru. But other goals, like wanting to become fluent in Spanish, can leave you with a wide range of choices. If this is the case, you will need to identify secondary levels of interest such as history, culture, environment, or perhaps long-term business opportunities.

4. **Where and with whom do you want to live?** With a host family? In your own apartment? In a dorm with other students? And if the latter, with other American students, with students from all over the world, or with local students? Do you want to go abroad with a group of friends?
5. **How long do you want to be overseas?** Options typically include anything from two weeks to a full academic year. For many, however, especially those who have jobs or who are locked into rigid course sequences, a summer program might prove to be the best alternative. Others study overseas for a full year after receiving their U.S. bachelor's degree.
6. **How proficient are you in a second language?** Are you proficient enough to take classes in that second language? (If so, you should certainly do so.) Or is your skill level high enough that you can have conversations, but you think that coursework will be too much of a struggle? If so, you will need to find a program taught in English. However, you may also be able to take additional language classes while you are there, and make the most of out-of-classroom opportunities to improve your local language skills.
7. **What is the program going to cost?** While tuition and fees plus room and board account for the lion's share of the expenses of studying abroad, there are frequently other expenses involved, and you will need to plan for these as well. Among the more obvious are airfare, visa fees, and everyday expenses such as food and local transportation. But don't forget to account for additional expenses such as excursions, field trips, and mobile phones.
8. **Are you currently receiving financial aid?** If so, will you be able to apply it to the study abroad program? If not, will you be able to find an alternative source of funding?

- 9. Do you have a job or internship that will be adversely affected?** If so, find out if you can be granted the time off and if it will be possible to reapply upon your return. Many employers may be impressed that you are picking up and moving overseas to further your education, and may be willing to accommodate you. But you'll need to verify this in advance.
- 10. How much freedom do you want or need?** Study abroad programs differ widely in their structure, formality, and level of independence. Keep in mind that there are pros and cons to both ends of the spectrum, and that living in another country offers a degree of independence all by itself!
- 11. What do you want most out of the experience?** Do you most want to learn, experience a new culture, teach, gain work experience? Whatever your specific objective is, make sure that the study abroad program you choose can help you achieve it.
- 12. Do you have a disability?** Talk with your study abroad office or program, and alumni with similar experiences. Be realistic about the challenges you may face, as well as open to the possibilities and opportunities. Research your specific needs, build support networks, and trust in your adaptability and resilience once abroad.

This list should help you begin to sort through the many considerations you'll need to weigh about any individual program. But keep in mind that although these practical elements are all important to some degree or another, an open mind and your level of personal preparedness will probably have the greatest impact on your international experience.



#### QUICK TIP

***The better you can articulate your own personal goals for studying abroad, the better your chances of selecting the best program.***



## THE WRONG REASONS TO STUDY ABROAD

If you're looking for academic escape or a stress-free semester primarily spent gallivanting about, studying abroad is not for you. If you simply want to travel abroad, then do so—and dispense with the studying part. Not only will it be less expensive overall, you will be able to do it at the time of year that best suits your schedule, and you will be able to go wherever you want, not just where a suitable program is offered. Just don't expect the same results. Studying abroad offers the chance to study with professors in a university system different than your own. It affords you the opportunity to take classes that aren't offered at your home campus, often in a second language. It enables you to study alongside students from the host country and a diverse group from around the world. You'll actually be in a learning environment, not just a travel mode, which means challenges—and rewards—on a completely different scale.

## How Do I Get Credit?

Every college and university sets its own guidelines regarding how it approves study abroad coursework. Credit is not automatic. If credit transfer is important to you—and we strongly recommend that you seek credit while studying abroad—you should discuss credit transfer policies with your school. There are two standard types of credits. **Resident credit** treats your study abroad as an extension of your studies on the home campus. Your study abroad grades will be calculated into your overall GPA and individual courses will appear on your transcript. Many academic departments prefer this type of credit option, and it's often the safer bet in transferring credits. **Transfer credit** treats you as a student who has taken a leave of absence. You will need to request an official transcript from the accredited U.S. or foreign institution with an English translation (as needed) to be sent to the registrar or study abroad adviser upon your successful completion of a program.

Once you've chosen a study abroad program, select your courses and seek out preapproval for each course, either prior to leaving or as soon as you've arrived. It's a good idea to select twice as many courses as you actually plan to enroll in, just to save

you the hassle of dealing with cancellations and replacement courses. Make sure you bring the contact information of your campus adviser with you should you need to request information or approval for changes once you're abroad.

Institutions abroad may also have their own rules for study abroad coursework and credit transfer. The terminology may be different, and grades may be determined differently in other countries and this can affect your credits being transferred. For example, attendance and class participation may be weighted more or less depending where you study, or grading systems may be different. Moreover, there may be pre-requisites required to take certain classes, so be sure to investigate all your options.

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#### FROM A STUDENT

*My credits did transfer in the end, but the one thing I would stress about credit transfer is to stay VERY on top of it, including keeping copies of any and all documentation referencing it. My university lost my course equivalencies (the documentation guaranteeing that my credit would transfer) multiple times, and if I hadn't had my own signed copies to send them, I may as well have taken the semester off.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

*I went abroad as a sophomore. I had all of the general education requirements completed, and I was able to work on major requirements while abroad. Before going overseas, I reviewed coursework equivalencies with my academic adviser and the study abroad office, which helped me be prepared for enrollment day and stay focused on my degree plan. I studied one academic year in Ireland, but the credit transferred as the equivalent to two years in the U.S. I graduated college in three years because of study abroad—best decision of my life!*

— Nicole Lawson, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Ireland.

*I did not transfer several of the courses from Oxford, but I was fine with that since I studied abroad mainly to do research. I was willing to extend my undergraduate degree by an extra year (I graduated in five years) in order to do more research and also enjoy my study abroad.*

— Brian Hardin, University of Texas at Austin. Studied abroad as Gilman Scholar in England. Awarded a Fulbright to Switzerland.

## Proper Planning and Preparation Enhances Success Abroad—and Helps You Convince Skeptics

Once you've decided that studying abroad makes sense for you, and you've chosen a program—or at least narrowed down your selection—you're ready for the next step: convincing your parents and/or advisers that it's the right thing to do. This also includes friends, significant others, and possible naysayers who will want to throw cold water on your hot idea. Keep in mind that less than 15 percent of U.S. undergraduate students study abroad prior to graduation, so you will be in the minority at many institutions. But that's what makes the experience special. Let's take each group in turn:

**Professor or adviser:** While most college educators actively encourage their students to study abroad, not all believe it is always the wisest thing to do. Those with objections focus primarily on the specific classes or credits that you will be missing by not staying on the home campus. The best way to counter their arguments is to have already determined that all overseas credits will transfer and that you will be able to meet all your graduation requirements on the schedule that you have previously set. Document everything because mistakes can happen!

### FROM AN EDUCATOR

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*Prior to the GLOSSARI research, many stakeholders—including some parents and administrators—had thought of studying abroad as disrupting or interrupting the serious students' program of study. And they presumed that studying abroad would be too risky for "marginal" students. Through rigorous methods involving a large database, GLOSSARI has debunked those suppositions. Now we know that studying abroad does not disrupt most students' progress toward degree; rather, it focuses them so that they are more likely to graduate in a timely fashion. Nor should students with low admissions credentials be discouraged from studying abroad; rather, they should be encouraged, for they receive even more value added than do students who enter college with high school records that virtually guarantee their success with or without studying abroad.*

— Donald L. Rubin, professor emeritus of communication studies and language and literacy education and research director, GLOSSARI, University of Georgia.

**Parents:** The three biggest obstacles for most parents tend to be safety, cost and program credentials.

- **Safety** matters. Most parents will have a long list of safety concerns that they'll want addressed before they agree to let you study abroad. You will need to address these, not just generally, but with facts, information provided by your campus or program organizer, and quite possibly an endorsement or two from an adviser or the parent of a student who has previously participated in the program. For more on safety, check out Chapter 7.
- **Cost** can be a real stumbling block, especially if your financial aid can't be transferred, if you won't be able to earn money yourself while abroad, and if money is tight because studying abroad almost always costs more (especially with all the extraneous expenses) than staying put on your home campus. Do your homework to find the most cost-effective programs, and be sure to look into the financing options (check out Chapter 4).
- **Program credentials** are important. Your parents probably view your education as an investment in your future, so they don't want to see you waste your time—and your/their money—studying abroad if you won't gain at least as much from the experience as you would staying put on your home campus. So make sure that you reassure them that your courses are worthwhile, your credits will transfer, and you're going to learn and enhance your career prospects. For specific insights on how study abroad can enhance your education, refer them to Chapters 1 and 10.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I think many parents agree with the concept of study abroad and the opportunities it provides for their children. My parents don't see the need for me to convince them to study abroad, but rather to convince them of my responsibility and safety beforehand. If I know the who, what, when, where, why, and how about the study abroad program and host country, they'll see that I took the time to investigate my options to be able to answer most of their questions prior to talking to them. That's all the convincing I have to do.*

— Morgan Abate, Elon University. Preparing to study abroad.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*The two biggest selling points for my family were that my study abroad experience was covered by my scholarships and they could visit!*

— Nicole Lawson, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Ireland.

**Friends/significant others:** There is only so much that you can say to friends and significant others who, for whatever reason, don't want you to go. The most effective response, however, is a clear articulation of why you want to go and how important it is to you personally and/or academically. Your true friends should accept your decision, even if they may not like it. They should understand that you should pursue not only study abroad but also other life-enhancing experiences now, before you begin to acquire the "baggage" of adult life, such as a spouse, children, a job, or a mortgage. If your friends still don't understand, be prepared to feel left out both prior to leaving and when you return. People who spend significant time living overseas are forever changed by the experience. Not better, but different, and it usually affects our relationships with those who haven't had similar experiences. In any case, don't let a friend or relationship of the moment, however strong, stop you from obtaining benefits that will last a lifetime. You will make lifelong friends abroad, most of whom you probably would not have met at home.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*My (now former) boyfriend was extremely opposed to my going away for a semester, and he was pretty nasty at times trying to make me feel guilty about leaving. I didn't see it as an option or that it was my job to convince him "to let me go." Living in Costa Rica had been a lifelong goal of mine, and he could either respect my choices or we'd break up. But we didn't break up, and he made my preparations far more stressful than they needed to be, interfering with my family time, picking fights, and begging for me to spend more time with him. Although I was glad to be leaving, the negativity affected me more than I realized when I started on my dream trip.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

## ADVICE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Parents** often play a role in their youth's perception of opportunities, and their concerns or opposition to study abroad is likely to influence their son or daughter. Seek out role models to help you make your case (and then become one for others after you return).
- **Attitude of study abroad advisers** may be less optimistic, especially if they've never worked with a student with disabilities before. Help them understand your point of view; bring an ally and advocate with you to shore up support.
- **Costs** for disability-related exchange accommodations, such as personal assistants or equipment, make the funding of international programs even more difficult. People with disabilities may have access to funding that can be used to go abroad if it relates to your education and career plan. Options include using vocational rehabilitation, scholarships, or transitional funding for international exchange.
- **Disability benefits** may be interrupted when you go abroad. If you're concerned about losing any benefits, such as Social Security disability income, look into what requirements a program must meet to keep you eligible. For example, you may need to think about program accreditation, and length of time you will be out of the United States. For more information, see Social Security or Vocational Rehabilitation and Going Abroad: [www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/ssa](http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/ssa).
- **Access and disability-related accommodations** abroad are not going to be the same as you are used to at home and on your home campus. Consider how flexible you are willing to be and your comfort level with non-standard access. For example, are you comfortable asking for help to cross a busy street with no pedestrian right of way? Or being lifted up stairs? Or traveling with a manual wheelchair versus a power wheelchair? Once you narrow down programs, this will help you to decide what aspects of the program you are ok with, and which will be deal breakers.

- **Standard health insurance policies** for travel or study abroad may not cover medications, equipment, counseling, or medical visits related to pre-existing conditions, so look at policy exclusions and into separate supplemental policies to fill in gaps.

In sum, a good study abroad program will challenge, stretch and enrich you. Finding a good one—by which, of course, we mean a good one for you specifically—requires extensive advance planning and preparation. And good preparation starts with an honest self-assessment, detailed research of the numerous program types, and a clear articulation of what you hope to get out of the experience.

### **A Role Model for Study Abroad with Disabilities**

Cheri Blauwet, a medal-winning wheelchair racing athlete who competed for the United States Team in the Paralympic Games in Sydney '00, Athens '04, and Beijing '08 before going to Stanford Medical School and becoming a Chief Resident of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at a rehabilitation hospital, is a notable role model for students with disabilities. After studying abroad in Argentina as an undergraduate with the help of a Boren Scholarship, she became an advocate for disability issues in the U.S. and abroad, and received an award from the American Association of People with Disabilities for her potential to change the face of the disability movement. She is a member of the International Paralympic Committee Medical Commission, and has published extensively and spoken internationally on the power of sport to promote both well-being and disability rights for individuals with mobility impairment.



# TOP TIPS

## Top 10 Tips for Deciding to Study Abroad

1. *Make sure you are ready for the personal challenges.*
2. *Determine how studying abroad will enhance your degree.*
3. *Crunch the numbers to confirm you have the necessary funds.*
4. *Choose a place that you're particularly interested in or curious about.*
5. *Consider the important role of language learning abroad.*
6. *Confirm that your credits can be transferred.*
7. *Recognize that you'll benefit more if you don't hang out primarily with other Americans.*
8. *Articulate your personal goals for studying abroad.*
9. *Talk with professors, advisers, parents and friends about the opportunity.*
10. *Prepare properly to enhance your success abroad.*





## CHAPTER 3

# Choosing a Program

Studying abroad is inherently appealing on a number of fronts, and we've already noted that international experience may prove to be important to your professional future. As a result, it's hardly surprising that more and more students are opting to study abroad each year, and that colleges and universities are responding by offering multiple programs in an increasing number of locations. While this is all good news to the prospective study abroad student, the downside is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to winnow through all the options to select the best program.

## Expectations of Programs

Although studying abroad is usually great fun and invariably exciting, to be truly worthwhile it needs to also be academically and intellectually challenging. Not all programs measure up, and you aren't doing yourself any favors if your experience is mostly just fun and games. The best programs have solid reputations for academic rigor and cross-cultural outreach. They should have entrance requirements, and not just be open to anyone who can pay the tuition. Ideally, they should also be integrated into your ongoing academic curriculum, though this is not always necessary. These are the programs that will enhance your academic transcript, and help you stand out after graduation.

To help ensure that you get the most out of your overseas experience, many programs now require intense language and academic preparation, research projects,

presentations, or other serious academic work. Whether your program lasts three weeks or a full year, you should begin with intense cultural and intellectual preparation well before you leave your home campus and conclude with an involved reentry and reintegration course.

Some examples of bringing academic rigor to the studying abroad program, while providing a deep, cultural dive for the richest experience possible include:

- Predeparture courses in history, geography, economics and politics.
- Research assignments that require students to delve into a particular aspect of the destination country's history or culture and present their findings both before departure and again, with updates, upon return.
- Inclusion of study abroad as part of a course, often business or international relations, by teaching from the perspective of a particular group, say customers, manufacturers or government regulators.
- Intense language study, the goal of which is to reach a certain level of proficiency prior to departure.
- Interaction with international students on the home campus in order to help prepare study abroad participants for cross-cultural interactions.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I chose a program so that I would be able to further my language skills. Living in Granada, Spain, in a homestay allowed me to open my mind to a different linguistic manner, and come close to fluent in the language I so desperately wanted to learn.*

— Gregory Chocheles, Bryant University. Studied abroad in Spain.

*My introduction to the Russian language and culture began with a girl—a high school exchange student from Astrakhan, Russia—who first opened my eyes to foreign culture and the idea of world travel. Following my junior year in high school, I lived with her family in Russia for one month. This is where I first discovered my passion for languages and thirst to experience different cultures from around the globe.*

— Cody White, West Virginia University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Russia. Awarded Gilman Scholarship to study in Oman.

## FROM A STUDENT

*My mom was the one who got me to officially decide to study abroad. Back in high school, she shared with me her regrets about not studying abroad and told me that I wouldn't have another time in my life for an experience like this again. So I reviewed many different programs and emailed with students who previously studied abroad. With their advice and experiences, coupled with my mom's encouragement, I realized that it was something that not only I but also everyone should look into doing!*

— Caity O'Shaughnessy, Xavier University. Studied abroad in England.

## QUICK TIP



***Find a faculty “champion” to discuss your intended study abroad program and communicate with this person while you’re abroad. Make sure that your champion is among the first people you see when you return to campus to help you leverage your experience and write letters of recommendation later.***

Many students we’ve spoken to over the years have simply decided they wanted to study abroad for the experience itself, not for any career enhancement. That’s all right, but a new trend is now emerging. Students have gotten wise to the fact that today’s employers need globally savvy workers and recognize that with a little bit of extra planning, they can tie this rewarding experience to career goals. Only you can determine exactly what it is that you hope to get out of studying abroad and the personal enrichment that comes with it. But if you’re interested in also using the experience to enhance your professional résumé, here are some program aspects to look for:

- **Local language coursework.** Content classes (history, literature, business) taken in languages other than English demonstrate foreign language proficiency.
- **Diverse student bodies.** Programs that attract participants from all over the world will be richer culturally. They also foster greater proficiency in cross-cultural teamwork, thus better preparing you for global teams.
- **Regionally relevant content.** You should be going abroad to study in a specific geographic and cultural context. Ideally, your program will take advantage of this with introductions to area experts and enhanced access to local information sources and perspectives.
- **Curricula-driven study abroad.** Some top programs bring global students together to work on a regional problem such as water-use rights, fair-trade practices, or cultural preservation. Employers know that time spent working on global teams in an academic context is excellent preparation for global jobs.
- **Location matters.** Prospective employers are increasingly interested in where you choose to study abroad. If you studied in a country where you know the prospective employer has operations, you can work this into your résumé or cover letter. Branching out beyond traditional Western European countries and into countries such as China, India or Brazil signals an enhanced awareness of growing global economies—and a direct link to the places most companies are expanding and growing. These nontraditional destinations also offer more challenging situations, thereby intensifying the learning and maturation curve.

## Start with Your Study Abroad Office

Among those who responded to our survey, 65 percent studied abroad on their own college's program. A further 18 percent went with an organization approved by and/or paid through their college, while 14 percent went with a completely independent program. Nationally, the *Open Doors* report shows that about 70 percent of students go on programs through their own colleges. The point here is that though you are most likely to end up participating in a study abroad program run or coordinated by your home campus, there are a number of other options including going through a program offered by an organization that specializes in study abroad or enrolling directly in a program offered by the host country university, and you should be aware that they exist before you even begin the process of looking.

### QUICK TIP



***Study abroad offices may not have all the answers to fit every individual need. You must do your own investigative research to determine the best program for you.***

Having said that, the best place to begin looking is still at the study abroad office on your home campus. (If yours doesn't have one, see below.) The office's mission, after all, is to help students negotiate the myriad ins and outs of studying abroad, and their advice will be tailored exclusively to the specific institution's students (you) and not students in general.

However, no one office or person has all the answers. There are simply too many different study abroad programs for one office or individual—no matter how competent or dedicated—to know thoroughly or even be aware of. The study abroad office is a great starting point, but you will need to find and fill in the gaps.

Here's what you can expect from your study abroad office:

- A list of approved programs.

- Information about credit transfer processes and course load equivalents at overseas universities.
- Evaluations of university-sponsored programs.
- Contact information for members of your own student body who have already studied abroad.
- Information about financial aid, scholarships and grants, both in printed material and online.

Most colleges also offer study abroad fairs, which take place once or twice a year and are designed to drum up excitement for studying abroad. Fairs usually have information booths and food from possible study abroad destinations to intrigue students who may not have considered an international experience yet. Plenty of fellow students who have recently returned from studying abroad are usually on hand to share their experiences. It's important to note that these events are meant to be fun and offer a first glimpse into study abroad opportunities. You'll need to follow up with more research on your own.

In addition, many U.S. colleges and universities have a separate study abroad library, or a section of the college library that is devoted to study abroad programs. Among the best reference guides is *IIE Passport: The Complete Guide to Study Abroad Programs*, published by the Institute of International Education. *IIE Passport* contains more than 9,500 study abroad program listings and is available in hard copy and online at [www.iiepassport.org](http://www.iiepassport.org).

A magazine called *Transitions Abroad* contains articles about study, work and travel abroad written by recently returned student participants, which you can access along with many other informational resources on the magazine's website, [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com).

Using the Internet, you should gather additional, supplemental, up-to-date information on hundreds of programs and foreign universities; on scholarships, fellowships and grants specifically geared to study abroad; on career-oriented internships and volunteer opportunities; on international travel; on particular countries or specific fields; on getting your passport and any required visas; on health and safety conditions; and on currency exchange rates and banking. You should also study and discuss your findings with campus advisers and fellow students.

## NO STUDY ABROAD OFFICE?

If your campus doesn't have a study abroad office, you're obviously going to have to be more independent and resourceful in researching opportunities. You'll be freed from feeling obliged to give special consideration to the programs they recommend, but you will also have to be discriminating. An entire study abroad industry has cropped up over the past few years and not all of the players have your best interest as their top priority. Here are our top tips:

- Check out the *IIE Passport* directory, a guide to 9,500 study abroad programs worldwide.
- Identify a professor or adviser who is willing to help you through the process.
- Find students who have recently studied abroad to determine how they did it and how well it worked for them.
- Ask your adviser or counselor about how being absent for a semester or two will affect your academic credits, and whether credits from abroad can be transferred.
- Begin to choose a location, duration and time for your study abroad experience, and conduct more in-depth research on programs that meet those criteria.
- If you're receiving financial aid, inquire about whether you can apply it to a study abroad program and whether you can renew it upon your return.
- If you don't have a passport, apply for one. If you do, make sure it is good for at least six months after your estimated return. If you know which country you will be going to, find out about visa requirements and the process for getting one.
- Before you sign anything, present your study abroad package to your professor/adviser to confirm the viability of credit transfer as well as the effects of leaving your home campus.

## Type of Programs

After you've gone to the study abroad office and perhaps attended a study abroad fair and heard all kinds of enticing stories, you may be ready to board a plane! But once you are overseas, it's going to be difficult to make amends for a poorly thought-out decision. Take the time to investigate the various available program types. Every campus is different. Some offer a wide variety of programs, while others offer only a few. Whatever type of program you decide to pursue, make sure you work with the study abroad office or with an adviser assigned by the institution. This will make your life a lot easier when it comes to credit transfer, financial aid, course approval, and all the other "small print" inherent in any study abroad program. Ignoring or disregarding the established policies and procedures will only result in unnecessary and burdensome hurdles later on.

No matter how large your undergraduate institution is and how many students it sends abroad every year, its menu of study abroad programs cannot possibly include the best option for every student. As a result, institutions have developed a variety of different types of programs and partnerships. The following are the most common types of study abroad programs, each of which has pros and cons:

- 1. University sponsored:** Your university or college either owns its own overseas facilities or sends faculty members abroad to teach its study abroad students. The primary advantages of such programs are: you're likely to already have friends or acquaintances attending the same program, the level of instruction is standardized (and known to the students beforehand), and credits are guaranteed to transfer. The potential downsides are that the professors will usually be from your home campus (with fewer international perspectives) and the opportunity to meet other international students is greatly reduced.
- 2. Consortium:** Your university or college works in conjunction with other academic institutions to form a single, collaborative program to which all partners have access, giving you a much wider range of approved programs to choose from. Sometimes universal standards do not apply, however. Each school handles the process differently, which means that your participation can be smooth or complicated, costly or inexpensive.



- 3. Direct enroll:** You enroll directly in an international institution, taking its courses and making your own travel and arrangements. This can be done under the auspices of your university or independently. The greatest benefit of these programs tends to be the flexibility and independence involved, but that generally means more time commitment on your part up front. They also can be considerably less expensive. You may need to know the local language well enough to take classes, so be sure to check.
- 4. Study abroad organizations:** An outside organization, such as American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS), makes most arrangements, including submitting your application, organizing travel details, and arranging housing and excursions. This can be done under the auspices of your university or separately. These organizations, sometimes known as third-party providers, specialize in study abroad, and those that are well established—like AIFS (celebrating its 50th year in 2013)—tend to be very professional and adept at handling any need that arises. While using an outside organization generally means less time commitment for students upfront and more structure on the ground, it can also be more expensive, if you are enrolled in a state institution. But for students who haven't traveled much internationally before, and whose parents are inclined to worry, this is an attractive option.
- 5. Exchange:** As an exchange student, you are essentially swapping places with a student from an overseas university through an arrangement between the campuses. As there are generally only a certain number of participants and a limited number of exchange campuses, such programs tend to be highly competitive. It is, however, usually one of the least expensive options. Yet not all colleges offer exchange programs.

Cost can often be the decisive factor in these decisions. In an effort to encourage more students to study abroad, many universities have created programs that enable their students to pay the same tuition and housing costs they would if they stayed on the home campus. Some universities are partnering with other large institutions around the world to create global campuses they share in order to provide the same level of academic instruction to students, are creating new campuses of their own, or are developing joint and double degree programs offered in partnership.

### Sample Program | New York University

One program that strives to offer its students real-world understanding of today's global business environment is NYU's BS in Business and Political Economy (BPE) program. Launched in 2009, BPE offers a fully integrated, four-year undergraduate degree that combines business, politics and economics with three semesters—or nearly 40 percent of the length of a typical undergraduate degree—spent abroad in three of the most important business centers in the world. Participants start out as on-campus freshmen in New York City, move to London for their sophomore year, and spend half their junior year in Shanghai before returning to New York.

#### FROM A STUDENT

*I have found NYU Stern's BS in Business and Political Economy appealing because it integrates our curriculum in a meaningful way with our study abroad experience. For example, when we studied transition economies, we went to places like Prague and Shanghai where we could appreciate the political and economic ramifications firsthand. These are experiences you can't replicate without university support, and I have gained a profoundly different understanding of human and cultural differences that I certainly didn't have when I graduated from high school. Sometimes we reduce foreign nations to unrepresentative clichés; and, although they contain some truths, seeing the countries in person has deepened my respect for how we discuss them in the United States. Beyond that, my study abroad experience has taught me to try new things, to enjoy traveling, and to think differently. After all, there's a whole world waiting for us out there, so why just stand back and watch?*

— Bryan Rozycki, New York University. Studied abroad in China, England. Volunteered in Peru.

## **IIEPASSPORT: THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS**

IIE has produced print editions of its study abroad directory, *IIEPassport*, for nearly 60 years and now offers it online at [www.iiepassport.org](http://www.iiepassport.org). These comprehensive directories currently list more than 9,500 study abroad programs worldwide. *IIEPassport* is the premier resource for U.S. students seeking international study opportunities. The directory provides information about postsecondary study abroad programs open to U.S. citizens who are undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate students; adult or continuing education students; or professionals in various fields including business, education, health and law. The majority of programs are intended for undergraduates, but IIE actively seeks information about international programs that are of interest to other categories of learners. Program sponsors include U.S.-accredited colleges and universities, foreign universities, language schools, educational associations, binational agencies and others.

IIE does not review or evaluate programs listed in the directory. Inclusion of a program does not imply recommendation by IIE, nor does omission mean disapproval. Program evaluations and additional information must be requested directly from the program sponsor.

On the *IIEPassport* website, you will find a wealth of information about study abroad resources, the various types of programs, blogs written by study abroad professionals, and scholarships and funding sources. To help you sort through the numerous options, the online search tool on [www.iiepassport.org](http://www.iiepassport.org) allows you to narrow your options. You can search by country, subject, language, format, term, cost range, and more. Information in the directory is updated based on an annual survey. With so many listings to choose from, it can be overwhelming! But it offers the most comprehensive list of resources related to study abroad in one place.

All program descriptions indicate whether an accredited U.S. college or university sponsors the program, since this information is important for students who need academic credit for their study abroad, as well as information on eligibility, language of instruction and cost.

## When to Study Abroad

In the past, most students went abroad to study during their junior year. This is still true today with the largest group—more than one-third of students having studied abroad recently—doing so as juniors. The majority of students who took our survey studied abroad so for one semester, and their responses show that studying abroad during the junior year worked successfully for them. But just because most students do it this way doesn't mean that you have to. The growing numbers of options available are changing things. Many new programs are being offered for college freshmen, sophomores and seniors, and often a student will begin with a short-term study experience and then take part in a longer one later. With careful planning, you can actually study abroad at any point during your college career. You are best qualified to determine the time that is right for you, especially since your decision may hinge just as much on your course load, sports you play, campus groups you're involved in, and jobs or internships you have as it does on your school's program options. You may find it best to study or intern abroad for a few weeks, a month, a semester, or even a year. And while we believe that any time or timeframe can be made to work, we should note that the longer your study abroad program lasts, the more you are likely to benefit from the immersion in a language or culture that is different from your own. Here's a snapshot of what it might be like for you, according to the year and amount of time.

### FAST FACTS FROM OUR STUDY ABROAD SURVEY

**99% completed their program**

**82% agreed that their college/university offered a program in the country they wanted to go to**

**95% successfully transferred study abroad credit**

**95% agreed they benefited “a great deal” or “a lot” from the study abroad program**

Source: *Study Abroad Survey 2013*

## Freshman

Colleges have begun to offer new programs for freshmen to study abroad, and some are even accepting students with the requirement that they go abroad during their first semester and then begin on campus in their second semester. While freshmen still make up only a small portion of all those who go abroad, this seems to be a growing trend. In some cases, the decision to study abroad as a freshman has to do with on-campus space limitations and the student's desire to defer his or her arrival on campus for a semester or even a year. In others, study abroad is part of the degree program for certain core curricula. Some of these universities have campuses around the world, and they are able to offer freshmen the opportunity to study abroad. Both circumstances usually mean that you'll have fewer choices about where to go. But the experience will still be an exciting, fun-filled adventure that may even get you thinking about going abroad again a year or two later. Starting college on a foreign campus is not for everybody, so be sure to speak to other students who've done it, even if this may be a bit tricky since you will not even be on campus yet! Since you will most likely arrange the program through your college, before you decide, request the names and contact information of a few students through your college's study abroad office. You can also search reputable online sources.

### Sample Program | Ohio State University

The Freshman Global Lab allows students who have been directly admitted to Fisher College, the university's business school, as freshmen to go abroad during their first year at Ohio State. The program combines a core class (Introduction to International Business) with a field study to Europe during May. By combining classroom instruction with experiential learning in two of Europe's most interesting economies, students gain insight into the daily challenges confronting business and governmental leaders in Italy and Ireland. Encouraging students to go abroad early in their academic careers facilitates a deeper understanding of the integrated, international business environment and leads students to pursue longer, immersive programs such as semester or summer study and internships abroad.

## Sophomore

Most schools require you to have completed a specified level of core requirements before going off to study abroad. If you're extremely well organized—and start planning as a first-semester freshman—you may be able to satisfy those requirements in time to go abroad the first semester of your sophomore year. But most who study abroad as sophomores do so in the second semester. The most common reasons students give for going abroad during their sophomore year are:

- You want to study and improve your second language skills as quickly as possible.
- You want to spend as much time as possible on your major coursework at your home university, which frequently means your entire junior and senior years.
- There is generally more flexibility in choosing coursework abroad as a sophomore.
- You want to take advantage of the research, internship, job or leadership opportunities that typically present themselves more to upperclassmen.
- You're an athlete, a member of a club, or have a job or internship that requires you to be on campus during specific semesters.
- You want to study abroad more than once and so need to get started as soon as possible.

### Sample Program | Bryant University

Bryant University offers a Sophomore Experience Abroad, a three-credit course that begins on campus with students preparing intensely for the culture, history, language and economy of their destination country. They are required to write a paper on one specific aspect of the country and then make a presentation upon return. To ease culture shock, students participate in group discussions about culture, customs, and current events with the professor who will be accompanying them. They are then ready to spend two weeks experiencing a taste of cross-cultural interaction and a dash of independence. Since the Sophomore Experience Abroad fosters increased self-confidence and appreciation of the international experience, it often leads students to spend a semester or the entire junior year abroad.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I went abroad as a second-semester sophomore (the earliest my school would allow) solely for scheduling reasons. As a Spanish major, I had no trouble getting credit for a study abroad in Latin America, but the premedical program curriculum really isn't built for studying abroad. Because of the timing for the MCAT, going abroad my junior year was out of the question. As for going as a senior, I simply didn't want to leave the country for months during my last year of college, especially being very involved in my sorority, and I wanted the cushion of an extra year after completing my premed requirements in case I had any other graduation requirements to finish.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

*I chose to study abroad twice because during and after my sophomore experience in Florence I realized that my ultimate goal was to learn Italian. I didn't learn as much as I would have liked in Florence because English was the predominant language spoken during class and at home, as the program did not have a language prerequisite. After returning to campus in the U.S., I decided to throw myself into my language studies and ultimately chose to spend my entire senior year in Bologna, where I was able to fulfill my Italian major requirements at the University of Bologna.*

— Claire Harrison, University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Studied abroad in Italy.

*As a science/engineering major, I would encourage you to take courses in your degree curriculum so that study abroad does not delay your time to graduate. This may require you to find a school abroad that offers your major. In my case, I studied abroad at a university that offered mechanical engineering, although my major was biological engineering. But since I studied abroad during my sophomore year, I took general engineering courses at the time.*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.

## Junior

Junior year is the most popular year to go abroad and, in fact, some universities only allow students to study abroad then. For the vast majority of students, however, junior year simply presents the most advantageous timing. The most common reasons to go abroad as a junior are:

- Your university requires you to spend the last two semesters on the home campus.
- You have finally attained proficiency in a second language. This will enable you to better and more productively immerse yourself upon arrival, thus enhancing your abilities, and possibly enabling you to take content classes in that language.
- You plan to write a senior thesis and need to be on campus to do so.
- You plan to apply for a job, internship or graduate school and need to be on campus as a senior to do so.
- You're ready to go: You have matured enough, your friends are going at a similar time, and you have established yourself on campus.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*I saved all of my elective classes so I could take them abroad in my junior year instead of taking my major classes, which made studying a lot easier while abroad. I also took them as pass/fail, which took the pressure off of my GPA being affected by circumstances I wasn't sure of before I went abroad. I was able to travel and enjoy all the excursions.*

— Heather Nelson, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

*I went abroad for the second time to the Czech Republic in my second semester of my junior year. The timing fit best with my overall schedule of classes and gave me ample time to organize my semester abroad. After graduation, I applied for and received a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship and lived in Slovakia for 10 months. The skills I've gained through my collective experiences are the foundation of my career.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic. Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.



## Senior

Senior year is now the second most popular time to study abroad, and nearly a quarter of those who study abroad for academic credit do so during their senior year, which sometimes includes the summers before or after. However, before you plan to wait until senior year, be sure to check with your school. Some schools require you to be on campus for at least one of your last two semesters in order to complete core requirements or write a thesis, so it is important that you do not miss out on the opportunity by waiting too long. For those who do go as seniors, the obvious preference is first semester, and the reason for going is that they just haven't had the opportunity to go before then. Or, they want to take advantage of the wonderful opportunities that are available to them as a student, and go one more time before they graduate. Some even finish their required course load and choose between graduating early and going abroad.

### Sample Program | Northeastern University

Since 1994, Northeastern University (NEU) has offered a BS in International Business (BSIB) that provides an opportunity to both study and work overseas in the language of the host country. Students in the BSIB program spend their first three years at NEU studying and completing a domestic co-op placement. Their fourth, expatriate, year is spent first studying language for a semester at a partner school abroad and then completing an international co-op placement. Students then return to NEU for their final semester. The BSIB program aspires to create future global managers who are ready to compete on the global stage. These budding internationalists graduate with a combination of coursework, language proficiency, and work experience under their belts. They are making a significant impression on hiring managers: more than 90 percent of BSIB students land a job upon graduation.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Even though most students were encouraged to study during their junior year, I studied abroad as a senior. Because I did not want to miss the opportunity to serve as an RA (resident assistant) my junior year, my study abroad plans were pushed to the fall semester of my senior year. After obtaining permission from the dean of academics, I was able to spend a semester in Madrid.*

— Crescendo Smalls, Wagner College. Studied abroad in Spain.

*I chose to spend my entire senior year in Bologna. I was older and had a clear purpose for why I was there. I wanted to learn the language, obtain an internship, make Italian friends, and immerse myself in my surroundings as much as possible. I wanted to break down the partition wall that normally separates students studying abroad from the locals.*

— Claire Harrison, University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Studied abroad in Italy.

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDY ABROAD**

Each year thousands of students from community colleges nationwide study abroad, even though it can be harder to fit study abroad into a two-year degree program. More and more U.S. community colleges are committed to offering study abroad options, recognizing the vital role they play in educating and training the globally competitive workforce of the 21st Century. Many of the programs run by community colleges offer hands-on practical experience in the student's field of study, and they tend to be flexible, shorter-term programs to enable more students to take part. Students have found that study abroad is a great way to enhance their experience, whether their goal is to get an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year college.

## How Long to Go

Most study abroad programs offer you the opportunity to be overseas for either a summer, a semester or a full academic year. Recently, however, a number of programs have been appearing that offer experiences that last between two to eight weeks, often in January (“J term”) or May. Just as there are pros and cons to studying abroad at different stages of your academic career, so, too, the duration of the program can have inherent advantages and disadvantages. The most important thing to remember here is that no matter how long you are gone, you need to maximize the benefit of the experience. This means planning: do the necessary background research beforehand, especially in regards to ascertaining exactly how your study abroad experience fits into your overall college career. Here’s a snapshot of what it might be like for various lengths of time.

### A Quarter or Less

Many universities have begun introducing their students to international academic study with short experiences abroad, coupled with on-campus coursework before and after departure that helps students prepare for the experience beforehand and profit from it afterwards. Because these programs involve only a limited time overseas, they usually have the advantage of being considerably less expensive. But they can also be very structured, with little opportunity for participants to explore on their own or experience what it’s really like to live in another culture.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I recommend a two-week course for study abroad because, for one, it is less expensive. You get a nice taste of what that country is like without taking away significant time from school or work. However, I didn’t get the chance to feel as if I really lived there, like I would have if I had been forced to fully unpack and settle in. On a longer trip I could’ve established a favorite place to eat or hang out, and would’ve made deeper friendships rather than acquaintances. But I’d say any experience abroad is much better than nothing at all. For students in academic programs that don’t reward you for studying abroad, or those on a tight budget, a two-week trip is the perfect compromise.*

— David Haury, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Japan.

## Summer Term

Many students who study abroad in the summer do so because they cannot fit it in anywhere else due to either a rigorous academic schedule, mandatory athletic team training, or a desire not to miss out on campus activities. Although there are many substantive summer programs and they are growing in popularity, some programs may be run as if they were summer vacations—as indeed they will be for some participants—with more of a focus on excursions and activities than rigorous academic study. So you will need to be careful when choosing a program to make sure the balance is right for you. There are many serious academic programs that are available over the summer. Here are a few tips when considering summer study programs:

- Make sure that all program credits will transfer and that classes you're interested in are being offered.
- Check into the viability of financial aid and scholarships.
- Be aware that many overseas universities do not run full summer terms, so your choices may be limited.
- If you're looking for practical cross-cultural experience more than an academic program, consider a volunteer or internship experience abroad instead of studying abroad.
- Speak with former participants to discuss how rigorous the academic offerings were.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*I traveled to Rome and Venice, Italy, for a two-week summer study abroad session with my undergrad institution. This was a great way to travel for the first time because I knew and was comfortable with the students and professors I traveled with. The classes and activities were designed specifically for us and our interests by professors that were invested in our learning and experience. I was intrigued with everything around me—food, people, culture, architecture—and this short trip left me wanting more international experience and study.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.

## One Semester or Two?

First, it's important to note that two semesters do not equal one year. Most programs are either three to four months for one semester, or six to eight months for two. Some students choose to stay on after two semesters and try to secure an internship, which allows them to spend a full year abroad, but this isn't as common as we'd like! In our experience, many students seem ready to begin studying abroad once they've returned. In other words, two separate study abroad sessions or a full year seem to offer the best advantages to students simply because of the longer time and more immersive experience. Deciding whether to study abroad for one or two semesters is a personal choice that needs to be made within the context of your academic plans. Here are some pros and cons to help you decide:

### ONE SEMESTER

#### *Pros:*

- Enough time to make friends
- Just enough time to get comfortable
- Improve second language skills
- Ability to incorporate a second study abroad experience into your schedule later

#### *Cons:*

- Not as much time to travel
- Hard to adjust within a shorter time period
- Feel as though it's not long enough
- Not enough time to put experience to use in host country

### TWO SEMESTERS

#### *Pros:*

- Enough time to make friends
- Get to know the area very well
- Travel more
- Greater fluency in second language
- Chance to really settle and live in country

#### *Cons:*

- More expensive
- Missing friends on home campus
- Long interruption in activities at home campus
- Could interfere with graduation timing and requirements

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Studying abroad as a junior is the best and worst time to be away from school. I went to Paris in the fall of my junior year. Ideally, I would have gone for a year, but I knew that the spring semester of junior year is an important time for internship recruiting and interviews. However, going for just one semester proved to be an exciting and wild ride. I fit in as much travel as I possibly could, while still experiencing Paris. It really helped that my program created an established group of Parisian friends, however, because I was immersed in the culture of Paris from day one.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.

*I believe that a full year is necessary if achieving fluency is a priority. Culture shock and homesickness can be significantly influenced by the language barrier... The real language learning begins once that adjustment period wears off. Overcoming the initial adjustment enough to really start absorbing the language also requires first developing a certain level of confidence because you must be willing to commit countless errors when you speak, and must accept and not be frustrated by corrections.... After only one semester, it may seem as though you are only beginning to feel like you have ‘mastered’ the language by the time the program ends.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year in Argentina. Studied abroad in Spain.

*I studied for a semester in London, and I don’t feel like it was nearly enough time, wishing every day that I had chosen two semesters instead of one. With two semesters you can experience more, travel more, and extend the best time of your life even more. However there is the aspect of finances. Without a job, it’s difficult to live in another country for a year. My dad financed my whole trip, and I knew that he was making a big sacrifice for me. If you decide to study for two semesters—which you should!—be sure you’re able to financially support the decision.*

— Heather Nelson, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

## Gap Year

A “gap year” is typically defined as the academic year between completing high school and beginning college. Some students apply to college and defer for a year; others simply wait to apply. A gap year provides students with opportunities to:

- Gain global perspective early on.
- Build language skills.
- Develop maturity and independence.
- Participate in professional communities as a volunteer/employee.
- Pursue various interests to help define a career path.
- Spend a year abroad if study abroad during time on campus isn’t an option.

Gap years come in all shapes and sizes: participating in an organized gap year program, volunteering with a particular organization, interning to get a sense of career paths, teaching English abroad, and even traveling the world as a tourist.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*A gap year was a chance to ask just how differently I could live and to question things that I considered fundamentally true. What is the proper way to greet somebody—a handshake, a bow, a kiss on the cheek? Have I really listened to the arguments against freedom of the press—from the people of the country, not from the media? Are seated toilets really superior to squat toilets—something just seems cleaner about not sharing a toilet seat? I took a gap year because I knew it was an opportunity that would never come again. I was young and able to spend the first year of my life alone in a foreign country. I took it, despite being a die-hard math and science student on her way to becoming an engineer, because I knew the math would come back, the internships would wait a year, the classes would still be there in a year, but I would never see a chance like this again.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

Gap years have also begun to gain popularity with recent graduates. Many choose to finish their four years of undergraduate study and, before going on to graduate school or a career, study abroad for a year or so while also traveling. But this can be much harder to do if you have huge student loans to pay back.

## Going Abroad as a Graduate Student

Studying abroad has typically been seen as an opportunity reserved for carefree undergraduates before they are forced out into the “real world.” But times are changing. Graduate students now have a wide range of programs that allow them to travel for a semester, a summer, or even complete part of their graduate degree at a foreign university. Most recently, 9 percent of all those who studied abroad for credit at U.S. universities were master’s degree candidates, up from 5 percent a decade ago. Beyond this, a number of students are also enrolling directly at an international university and getting their graduate degree abroad. It is becoming more popular to get a full degree abroad, although this is somewhat different from the context of much of what this book focuses on.



### QUICK TIP

***One of the benefits of going abroad as a graduate student: There are quite a few scholarships and grants available.***

Not surprisingly given the nature of the degree, there are clear distinctions between undergraduate and graduate study abroad programs. Graduate study abroad programs tend to be more intense and require students to be more independent. Unlike many undergraduate study abroad programs, graduate programs are usually made up of students from the same school. In addition, they are normally smaller than undergraduate ones, and are often highly specified field studies designed to supplement a class or key area of study. Another aspect of graduate study abroad is the ability to do intensive research or study related to your degree through fellowships and scholarships. Some countries place restrictions on the type of research they will allow. If you are doing research using human subjects, be sure to get the proper institutional clearances before you go.



## FROM A STUDENT

*I chose to participate in a dual-degree program with Oklahoma State University and Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla because I wanted a degree from a Spanish-speaking country, but I also knew I wanted the degree to have merit in the U.S. That is why I chose a dual-degree program, earning one degree from a U.S. institution and another from a foreign institution. I think dual-degree programs are incredibly valuable because you study in your home country, but you also have the chance to live and study abroad applying the knowledge and credits from your home country to your foreign degree and vice versa. I will end my master's study with two degrees, cultural competence, and language skills I did not have before; all within the time it takes to earn one master's degree.*

— Leslie Briggs, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Mexico. Completing graduate studies at Universidad Popular Autonoma del Estado de Puebla, Mexico.

*I decided to pursue my Ph.D. at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in Japan based on the criteria of 1) the program had to be in English, and 2) it had to be in Asia. APU was a relatively new university and Japan was actively seeking out foreign students to buoy the higher education system in an era of demographic change (there are significantly fewer youth to fill their universities), so they offered me a decent scholarship. APU is specially oriented toward foreign students, providing a fully bilingual program for undergraduates and only English graduate programs.*

— Cindy Banyai, Michigan State University. Completed graduate studies at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan.

*Doing my master's overseas was a very planned and considered decision. I chose Aalto University in Finland because it is a global leader in my field of entrepreneurship and innovation. Finland is strategically located between France and Russia, allowing me to tap my language skills and travel experience for the potential opportunity to work for companies who are expanding in both directions. Having spent almost \$100,000 on a bachelor's degree at a wonderful private school in the U.S., I like the price tag of FREE that Finnish universities carry. Plus, I knew that the education I'd get here would be unique and different from the one my peers would be getting in the United States.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

## MBA and Study Abroad

Approximately 70 percent of today's MBA programs now include an international component, either in the form of a term spent studying abroad or in pursuing in-depth international case studies. This is because there's an undeniable connection between global economies and business, and business students must develop a global mindset. MBA students have learned that having a global mindset requires not only possessing the technical skills necessary for operating successfully in an international environment, but the personal skills to apply them effectively. In order for professionals to work successfully across cultures, their worldviews must be informed by more than U.S. business, culture and tradition. The ability to work on global virtual teams and get results is part of the mindset, and includes soft skills such as flexibility, influence management, curiosity, and openness to learning new things. For MBA students, the opportunity to work with professors, business leaders, and local stakeholders on the ground in another country is an excellent opportunity to get valuable firsthand experience.

### Sample Program | George Washington School of Business

At The George Washington School of Business, Global MBA and World Executive MBA students are required to complete a comprehensive international experience comprised of both classroom learning and fieldwork. The courses are led by faculty who are country and industry experts. They begin with a primer about the target country's political, economic, socio-cultural and legal business environment, and how these issues affect a specific industry. The students then work in teams for organizations within that industry, doing project work in the United States and fieldwork in the target country. While in the field, students' understanding of the client context is further developed through site visits to buyers, suppliers, competitors, partners, government agencies, NGOs and other relevant organizations. For example, GWSB students have worked on a state-of-the-art hospital in Ethiopia, Walmart supply chain management in India, clean-tech projects in Peru and Sweden, and Ford Motor Company social media strategies in Turkey, just to name a few. The school's choice of market, industry, client and project are all shaped by GWSB's dedication to finding ways for business to make a positive impact on society.

## FROM A STUDENT

*As a Global MBA candidate at GW I chose to do two consulting abroad projects and one extended international exchange program. My first project was in Cairo, one year after the revolution and before the first presidential elections. We worked with a regional bank to make their corporate social responsibility programs profitable and financially self-sustaining. I learned a great deal about the business environment in the Middle East, and witnessed a changing and volatile political system in a country in transition. My second project took me to Sweden and centered around the renewable energy industry. The client was an engineering and manufacturing firm looking to break into the U.S. market, but had no experience or market research in the area. We were able to get firsthand exposure to top management, who implemented our recommendations and is currently involved in multiple projects within the U.S. This was a great experience, as we were able to add real and measurable value to our client.*

— Garrett Langdon, George Washington University. Studied abroad in Egypt, Sweden, Singapore.

## So Many Places to Choose From!

With so many possible destinations, selecting just one is not going to be easy. And just as with the other decisions you will need to make regarding studying abroad, self-reflection is critical to making a selection that is right for you. First and foremost, you need to think about what you want to get out of the experience and how your personal and academic goals align with specific destinations. A student seeking a brand new cultural experience who has an aptitude for and desire to learn a second language will probably choose a different location than a student who's focused mainly on a rigorous academic curriculum in a specific area of study. One other important factor is whether you are comfortable being "the different one." Since being perceived as "different" can be compounded when you are abroad, you should consider how far along the scale of difference you want to go based on your own preferences.

Most undergraduate students still choose the same European destinations that have been popular for decades: the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, Germany and Ireland consistently rank in the top 10, according to the *Open Doors* report, published

annually by IIE with support from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. For starters, the programs in these countries are generally safe, comfortable, and well established, and there is no shortage of students who have gone there before who will wholeheartedly recommend the experience.

If you're willing to look further afield, however, you might want to consider countries like China, India, Cambodia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan or the UAE, among others. All are rising global economic players with impressive economic growth. NGOs, entrepreneurs, and foreign investment dollars are all flocking to these emerging markets for a variety of reasons including their natural resources, development and infrastructure, ecotourism, technology advancement or environmental issues, and experience gained in these countries as an undergraduate will definitely give you an advantage later on as a job-seeker. But when compared to Western Europe, emerging markets are also rougher around the edges, to varying degrees.

When choosing a destination, it's paramount to keep in mind the goals you're trying to achieve: language acquisition, depth of cross-cultural interaction, and relevance to your prospective career path. Moreover, your destination should fit your personality while also challenging you to grow.

## What to Consider

**Languages spoken.** If you already speak a second language, choose a destination that enables you to immerse yourself in it. If you want to learn one, choose a place whose language you are interested in. And if going to a country that doesn't speak English frightens you, remember that the UK is not the only country outside the U.S. where English is commonly spoken. Moreover, some smaller countries whose number of native speakers is relatively small or whose language is particularly difficult for native English speakers to learn (e.g., Thailand or Korea) will offer many English-language course options to international students. In fact, English is becoming more prevalent as the language of instruction in a number of fields, particularly in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), so you may be surprised to find that there are a number of choices where you can practice the local language by living in the country, but take your classes in English. Many study abroad programs also offer core classes in English, along with beginner or intermediate level language classes.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I decided to study in Sweden because classes were available in English, and I had a good feeling about the culture. Sweden is very outdoorsy, laid back and friendly. Swedes believe in a concept called “lagom” which is untranslatable but basically is a Goldilocks word—not too much, not too little, just right. Lagom is a refreshing difference from the typical American more-more-more. I hadn’t done a lot of research into Sweden, but the nature, culture, history and remoteness interested me. I figured Sweden was more off the beaten path than other destinations in Europe.*

— Jackie Barber, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Sweden.

**Well-traveled or off the beaten path?** Do you want to spend your time abroad in a high-income economy or an emerging one? If you don’t know how developed a country is, you can consult data on economic growth and human development published by institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*After narrowing my choices to two programs in Africa, I decided I hadn’t gotten enough information to know that I could reasonably manage Dakar in a wheelchair, so I opted to study in South Africa. I believe serendipity was at work because the five months I spent in Cape Town certainly altered the direction of my life.*

— Rob Hurtekant, Georgetown University. Studied abroad in South Africa.

**Big city or country life?** Does an urban or a rural setting hold more appeal to you? Note that a major city in Europe will provide a very different experience than a major city in Africa. The same is true for the wide variety of rural settings in various countries and regions.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I decided to study abroad in London because I have always wanted to know what life would be like living in a big city. London gave me that opportunity, and also enabled me to experience a different part of the world. It also provided me the comfort of being in a place where I was able to speak the*

*language and understand people, so that I would not feel so lost or alone. If I could do it all over again, I would not choose any other place to study abroad. London gave me everything I was hoping for, and even more.*

— Caity O’Shaughnessy, Xavier University. Studied abroad in England.

**Relevance to your career?** If you already have a good idea about what profession you would like to pursue, you should choose a destination country that will enhance your knowledge of the subject. If there is a particular field that you think you might be interested in, a study abroad program that exposes you to it might prove to be a very worthwhile “experiment.”

#### FROM A STUDENT

*I was limited by my school’s programs. Argentina had one of the largest economies of South America, and as an economics major, I wanted to learn more about its view of the global economy. Plus, Buenos Aires is a really liberal and progressive place, so I would say the majority of my experience in terms of sexual orientation was positive. In fact I think I was really able to grow and be really comfortable in my own skin while I was there because it was such an open environment.*

— Benjamin, Elon University. Studied abroad in Argentina.

**Cost.** Prices can vary widely and remember that they encompass more than just the cost of the program itself. Cost of living varies, as do travel costs to and from your destination and within country and region. If you plan to travel—and you should, if possible—consider those additional costs.

#### FROM A STUDENT

*A scholarship opportunity from the Chinese government for a gap year presented itself through a program at my high school. I wasn’t incredibly interested in the offer for China and would have preferred a number of other locations. I had studied Mandarin for eight years at that point and concluded that while it was a fantastic language and represented a great culture, it wasn’t the language for me. I was very worried about putting off the things that were important to me at the time, such as my technical education, to spend a year studying one of my least favorite subjects. But I didn’t have*

*any other options for a gap year, had the scholarship offer, knew a little bit of Mandarin, which would make it easier to get beyond how a tourist experiences the country and actually begin to live there, and knew it was going to be incredibly different from my high school experience in the United States. Why China? Because, despite hesitations, I trusted that I would find many things that I could both enjoy and learn from in any place, even if I didn't know what those things were for China before I committed to the location. My trust was rewarded many times over.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

**Desire.** Is there a place that you've just always wanted to go to? Studying abroad isn't just practical, it can also help you fulfill a dream. Just be aware that the reality of a destination is not always what it is cracked up to be in movies, novels, travel books or documentaries. On the positive side, studying in a destination can show you sides to your dream destination that you would never see just on a short visit.

#### FROM A STUDENT

*I chose to study in Melbourne, Australia, after I learned that the program for my first choice, New Zealand, was full. However, looking back I almost feel that the destination might have chosen me that way. I ended up studying in a state with my same name, made lifelong friends who I later revisited and who visited me in the States and in other parts of the world, and had the opportunity to study alongside students who were NOT in my major classes. I became so passionate about the destination location that it led to my first break in work experience outside of college with the Australian Trade Commission. Every experience from my study abroad onward has been the result of a "back door opening" so to speak, into the next opportunity.*

— Victoria Mita, Loyola University Maryland. Studied abroad in Australia.

**History.** Perhaps you'd like to explore your heritage, or see what it's like to live in a country that was a former colony. Maybe a particular time in history—a particular war, the birth of a religion, a great historical civilization, a golden age of art or architecture—piques your curiosity. Seeing that history first-hand can bring a whole new level of understanding to an academic interest.

**QUICK TIP**

***Remember that you have the right to “challenge by choice,” the concept of deciding for yourself how much adventure or risk you are willing to accept.***

**FROM A STUDENT**

*I first took an interest in international affairs as an active member of my high school's Model United Nations team. Turkey was the first country I had represented at a conference, and in researching my debate topics, I became fascinated by the country's history, culture and politics.*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.

**Others' experience.** Although you shouldn't base your decision solely on another person's advice, friends and fellow students who've already studied abroad will have a lot of valuable insight to offer. Get them to tell you why they chose the destination they did, what they liked (or didn't) about the program, and what they would do differently if they had it to do over again. You'll find more ways others can help you in Chapter 6.

**FROM A STUDENT**

*I chose Morocco because it was different. Originally I began pursuing a degree in European policy, but one of my international relations professors explained that Europe is old business and not much is changing. He encouraged me to seek new, emerging markets. At the same time, a Moroccan student was placed in my dorm room. For me, it all fell in place, and I started pursuing Middle East policy. I now have an edge. I've seen things that many people never will.*

— Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.



You'll notice here that we didn't include "destinations offered by my college." To be sure, more than two-thirds of students who study abroad go with a program offered by their own undergraduate institution. Odds are you will as well, and many offer a wide variety of choices. But if your college offers a finite number of sponsored programs, we don't want you to fence yourself in before you've explored that wider range of options. Too many students go into their campus study abroad office, find out that their school promotes this or that handful of their own programs, choose the one that they find most appealing, and never bother to consider anything else. It takes a certain amount of moxie to go against the flow, but the results can be most rewarding.

## **A Few Words About Language**

One of the greatest benefits of studying abroad is language acquisition. Therefore, we encourage you to look at programs that include the opportunity to study a second language, especially in an immersive or semi-immersive manner. In addition to the cultural insights that you will gain, language skills are becoming an increasingly important differentiator among hiring managers. Even if you're not proficient, a solid working knowledge of another language indicates an openness to—and appreciation for—other cultures, a critical 21st century skill. And if the company you are interviewing with or working for just happens to have overseas operations in places where that language is spoken, well, that immediately makes you a more attractive candidate.

So, if you have studied a language for a few years and are actively looking to hone your skills, bravo! But keep an open mind about the many destinations that may offer you language options: If you speak French (or aspire to) your study abroad destination doesn't have to be France—it could be Switzerland, Belgium, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire or Guinea, not to mention French-speaking Canada. And your English-speaking destination doesn't have to be the United Kingdom—Ireland, Australia, Canada, Singapore, India and Hong Kong would work, as well as Anglophone Africa.

If Spanish is your language, Spain certainly fits the bill. But so, too, can Argentina, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Costa Rica, just to name a few. Spanish speakers are even going to Brazil to learn Portuguese, given the similarities in the languages. These

countries also have the added benefit of being part of Latin America, a region increasing in importance to the United States on many fronts. Latin America is a high priority for the U.S. government right now, with a new initiative in place called 100,000 Strong in the Americas, which supports greater international exchange of students between the U.S. and Latin America and the Caribbean. The initiative seeks to involve universities and colleges, the private sector and foreign governments to come together in partnership. A strong focus will be the promotion of a diverse profile of students for the two-way exchange. There are also special programs in place to encourage the study of Chinese, Arabic, and other languages that are key to U.S. national interests.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*As a Spanish major, I knew that my skills would not get me too far if I had not spent time immersed in the culture. Although I felt prepared on an academic level, once I arrived in Madrid I felt that my skills were nothing! I had to reorient myself with the language because I was not used to being surrounded by it all the time. I knew when I had begun to dream in Spanish that I was making strides.*

— Crescendo Smalls, Wagner College. Studied abroad in Spain.

*I think that the challenge with learning Arabic is that there are many specific, cultural references within the language. And while the textbooks convey some of those messages, it's hard to fully grasp and understand them until you actually are immersed in the culture and get a chance to use the language with real people.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

*The deaf organization called ENS (Ente Nazionale Sordi) is placed 20 minutes away from the AIFS school in Florence. I spent every moment of my free time at ENS because I was very hungry to learn LIS (Italian Sign Language). In the last two weeks before leaving to go back to America, I discovered that I could communicate with deaf Italians smoothly, and even engage in long conversation. Being able to share tons of stories about our cultures, experiences, politics and fairy tales is my most savored experience from Italy.*

— Perseus McDaniel, who is deaf, Edmonds Community College. Studied abroad in Italy.

## Where Will You Live? Housing Choices

Many study abroad programs have either their own overseas housing or a selection of established and reliable options. At others, participating students must make their own arrangements, a daunting task to be sure. But in either case, there's no denying that where and with whom you live is going to have a significant impact on your experience. Here's how to get started:

- **Research neighborhoods.** Security, safety, and proximity to classes are critical. You'll also want to be close to restaurants, grocery stores, laundry facilities, and local mass transportation.
- **Make friends easily by staying in the dorms.** Stay in dorms that are for local or exchange students, not just other American students. You'll have greater exposure to culture and language and be more likely to make local friends.
- **Live with a family.** Living with a host family typically provides greater cultural context and language immersion. However, it's important to be able to communicate with a host family about expenses and living conditions since you will be following their rules, so make sure arrangements are clear from the beginning. Make sure your homestay is in a neighborhood that is safe and close to campus, as noted above in the "neighborhoods" section.
- **Consider hostels and apartments.** Although generally a more expensive option, especially in developed countries, they offer some conveniences and amenities that are important to some students. Contact hostel owners about long-term options, as they may be able to give a price comparable to that of an apartment.
- **Ask for references, and be sure to indicate special needs.** While you can find so much online, so much of what you find is not necessarily reliable. So be sure to check out leads and references with other students and colleges that have a reputation of renting apartments to foreign students.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*As I applied to my study abroad program, I made sure to put on my application for housing that I wanted to stay with someone that would be open and accepting of my being gay. I think it is important to explicitly state that on the application.*

— Benjamin, Elon University. Studied abroad in Argentina.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I lived in a dorm with a Chinese roommate. I chose not to live with a host family because I had no knowledge of Mandarin prior to my arrival in Shanghai. Living in a dorm with a Chinese roommate was the perfect option for me. It was not overwhelming, but I still experienced the cultural exchange that I wanted. My roommate and I agreed that I would only speak in Chinese, and she would only speak in English. As a result of our agreement my Chinese improved considerably. I also made a new friend that I keep in touch with to this day.*

— Marikaa Nixon, Spelman College. Studied abroad in China.

*I lived with a family in a homestay in Chile. It was great in terms of being forced to speak the language with no option to default to English when I was frustrated and trying to get my point across! Full immersion is the only real way to learn a language. My family was very interested in my own background (not just as an American, but as a Chinese-Jewish American from California!), and we had some very interesting conversations at the dinner table about local history, culture, and their general way of living. I learned a lot from living with a host family that I could never have experienced spending time with only Americans.*

— Natasha F.C. Diamond, University of California at San Diego. Studied abroad as an undergraduate in Chile and Spain. Studied abroad as a graduate student, George Washington University, Mexico.

*I spent 11 months living in a difficult situation. I don't regret anything I did or anything that happened to me. I believe that the person I am today is a product of the experiences that shaped me back then. But if I had the chance for a do-over, I would have done one thing differently: changed my host family. The host family can be a make-it or break-it detail of the study abroad experience. I understand that being welcomed as a sibling in a foreign household can be one of the most rewarding, yet challenging, experiences of a lifetime, for everyone involved. But for those few who never overcome the culture shock and lifestyle differences necessary for living together, it can be uncomfortable and disappointing.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year abroad. Studied abroad in Spain.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*In any city in Germany, [www.wg-gesucht.de](http://www.wg-gesucht.de) is your best option to find an apartment. It is ALWAYS a long process, especially if you are not yet in the country when you start looking. Potential roommates will want to interview you in person most of the time and will have hundreds of others fighting for the same space.*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.

Most overseas universities will have an international dorm for students studying abroad or enrolled full time at the university. Because you are all students at the same university, dorms are generally the best place to make friends. They can also provide a wonderful opportunity to immerse yourself in the local language, but only to the extent that the local language is the lingua franca of the dorm. For example, if you find yourself in Brazil with students from mostly Asian and European countries, you may have little choice but to communicate with each other in Portuguese. But if there are large contingents of Americans and other English speakers—as there often are—English will probably be their language of choice. (Students from other South American countries may form their own Spanish-speaking clique.) Do check on the cost and logistics in advance.

If you truly want to be immersed in the culture and language of your host country, your best option is to skip the international dorm and live with students from the host country in the standard university dorms. Generally speaking, when given a choice, the vast majority of students elect to live in a dorm or shared apartment. Those who choose to live with a homestay family may do so because they are younger and looking for more dependence and structure, or because they have a strong command of the language and want to improve language skills. Others choose a homestay so they can really get to know a local family, or because their program arranges it.

For more information on housing options, check out Chapter 4 for cost comparisons, and Chapter 7 for safety tips.

Studying abroad will probably be one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences of your college career. It is both exciting and terrifying to pick up and

move to another country, one where you may not know anyone, one that you have never visited before, and, most importantly, one whose language you probably aren't anywhere near fluent in. You'll be making new friends, taking a few classes, and, most importantly, immersing yourself in the local culture. Make the most of it by properly researching many programs and selecting the one that best meets your objectives.

### **SAFETY**

You have every right to feel safe and secure in your living space. If you have any issues concerning your safety and well-being related to your homestay, hostel or dorm, contact your local program coordinator immediately. If you cannot get in touch with them, or they are not helpful, reach out to the U.S. coordinator of the program. If you truly feel unsafe, do not hesitate to take action and find new living arrangements, even if it means you lose a deposit or a certain amount of money. Your safety matters most. If the situation escalates to an emergency or you are a victim of a crime, contact the consular officer at the U.S. Embassy.



# TOP TIPS

## Top 10 Tips for Choosing a Program

1. *Visit your study abroad office and/or the study abroad resource section of your college library.*
2. *Do your research: Check out the IIE Passport directory at [www.iiepassport.org](http://www.iiepassport.org).*
3. *Figure out the best time to go.*
4. *Determine how long you intend to stay abroad.*
5. *Sort through the many places you can go and begin narrowing your list.*
6. *Use the opportunity to study a second language.*
7. *Review housing options.*
8. *Find a program that allows you to study abroad as long as possible, given your personal, financial and academic needs.*
9. *Determine whether your college offers you the program you really want or if you'll need to go with an outside provider.*
10. *Find a program that will help you enhance your résumé and differentiate you in job interviews.*





CHAPTER 4

## Figuring Out the Financials

Studying abroad may be expensive, but it's worth the investment. It's still probably the cheapest opportunity that most students will have to spend a significant amount of time overseas without actually moving there. Moreover, with a little research, you might be able to find scholarships and financial assistance to cover a significant percentage of the upfront cost. It is essential, however, that you figure out how you will fund your study abroad experience before submitting your application. Even if you are lucky enough to find a program with relatively minimal tuition fees, you'll still need to be able to cover living and travel expenses. Research is key. And so is saving your money—start today.

In this chapter we provide guidance on how to calculate the total cost of your study abroad program, how to go about finding financial aid and scholarships, and how to save—and possibly even make—money while you're overseas. Keep in mind that there is a lot of information out there online, on campus, and in the form of firsthand experience from friends and other students who've recently returned from studying abroad. It's up to you to go out and find it, sift through it, and decide what is most important and relevant to you. It is, after all, your experience and you will want to be as sure as you can that the program you choose is both affordable and a good investment.

## Don't Base Your Decision Entirely on Cost

Sure, cost matters. Certain locations such as Spain, England and Italy are inherently going to be more expensive than others such as Ecuador, Peru or Senegal. It all has to do with the host country's overall standard of living, especially as reflected in the postsecondary education system, and the overall price of basic commodities and services. For example, a semester abroad in China, the Philippines or India can cost significantly less than a more traditional program in England or Ireland, not including airfare or books. Nor are all programs in developed countries equally expensive. Just because you want to go to Italy, for example, doesn't mean that you have to attend a major university in Rome, Florence or Milan. But even more important than cost is having a fulfilling experience that meets your personal and academic goals.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*Until I was in college, I had never previously thought of foreign travel or study abroad as an option due to the cost. After receiving a scholarship to study in Italy during the summer of my sophomore year, I realized I could afford to travel and that two weeks in a foreign country was not enough time to immerse myself in another culture. So I decided to go again.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.

When considering the cost of a study abroad program, it's important to consider the factors involved. First and foremost, the cost of the program varies based on the type of program it is—a university-run program, a university-affiliated program offered through a study abroad organization, or an unaffiliated program—and its length.

Semester programs offered by your college or university will typically break the cost down into three categories: what students pay to the home university, what students pay to the host institution, and estimates of additional costs. University-sponsored or university-affiliated programs will most likely charge your regular semester tuition, a study-abroad fee, and trip and/or medical insurance. Housing is usually the one charge from the host university, but the cost will vary depending on where you choose to stay.

Additional fees, which will generally vary from person to person as well as program to program, can include:

- Transportation (both to the country and within)
- Meals
- Books and school supplies
- Spending money
- Visa and passport
- Immunizations

How do you know if a study abroad organization is affiliated with your university? Hopefully you have already begun your search with your campus study abroad office. If not there, then most college websites have a page dedicated entirely to the overseas institution with which it is affiliated. If your preferred program is not affiliated with a college or university, you can often get the program approved by petition—but this is not guaranteed, so be sure to work with your campus in advance to make sure you can get the credits.

**QUICK TIP**

***It's important to speak to parents, professors and study abroad counselors about the credibility and reputation of the program you choose.***

Even if you choose a more expensive study abroad destination, don't worry—at least not yet! Most academic institutions that believe in the benefits of studying abroad are well aware of the high cost of the experience. And they want to help you be able to afford it. To that end, you should be able to find plenty of resources right there on your home campus to help fund your study abroad experience.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I was a student at Ithaca College and my institution was not affiliated with my chosen program with AIFS. I petitioned for and received full credit for my semester abroad.*

— Susannah, Ithaca College. Studied abroad in Italy.

*I first came to Mexico as a senior at OSU. I did so in order to learn Spanish. Mexico was not my first choice; I wanted to go to Spain and see Europe. However, even though I didn't get my first choice (due to financial reasons), I knew the chance to live abroad would be very valuable, so I packed up and headed down south anyway. When I got here, every expectation I had about Mexico was completely blown away. Since I had only been inundated with media stories about drug lords, partying in Cancun, or the H1N1 epidemic, I learned very quickly what an amazing and beautiful country this was and I forgot all about Spain, "lawlessness" and disease. I fell so much in love with Mexico that I have returned twice: Once to work as an English teacher and now to study for my master's.*

— Leslie Briggs, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Mexico. Completing graduate studies at Universidad Popular Autonoma del Estado de Puebla, Mexico.

*I didn't take the opportunity to study abroad as an undergrad, and always regretted it. When I returned to pursue my MBA I wanted to be sure the international component was a major part of my graduate education, even if it meant taking out some extra student loans.*

— Garrett Langdon, George Washington University. Studied abroad in Egypt, Sweden, Singapore.

## Determine If You Can Apply Your Financial Aid to Study Abroad

Any financial aid that you already receive from your university should be transferable to a study abroad experience run by or affiliated with that university, because the tuition that you will be paying to study abroad is probably that of your home university. Some institutions will also allow students to use their univer-

sity aid for nonaffiliated programs, while others will not. Moreover, the amount of aid may vary depending on the type of program you choose. So don't assume that whatever aid you are currently receiving from your school will transfer over; you need to check with the financial aid office.

Federal financial aid can be applied to any program as long as credit is earned and your home college accepts the transferred credits. If you are currently receiving federal aid, you probably won't have to reapply for it. If you aren't, you can apply by filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). There's a chance you could get funding because you are applying the aid to an international study abroad experience. The same goes for state funding: it varies from school to school, so once again, be sure to check. Private scholarships also differ in their rules regarding studying abroad, so you may or may not be able to apply these to your study abroad program. Again, never assume. Confirm the situation with the scholarship provider sooner rather than later.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Financial aid is the only reason I was able to study abroad. Without it, I wouldn't have gone, period. Although I did get some scholarships that helped cut trip fees in half, it wouldn't have been possible for me to buy my plane ticket and make purchases abroad had I not had the extra money that financial aid provided.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

## Research Study Abroad Scholarships

Most colleges have a straightforward framework for applying for study abroad scholarships, one that lays out the potential amounts available, the process and deadlines for applying, and any restrictions that may exist. General scholarships for study abroad assistance, as well as targeted scholarships for diversity, first-generation (if you are the first in your family to attend college), and financially needy students are usually offered. Some departments (especially foreign language departments) and organizations on campus may even offer scholarships, but it will be up to you to identify them.

Regardless of where you want to go, what you want to study, and how long you want to be overseas, it's wise to look into all the study abroad–related scholarships and grants that are out there. And since this takes time, don't delay starting your research. Students must apply for scholarships and some can be very competitive, others less so. You'll find that some scholarships favor nontraditional destinations, not the typical opportunities in London, Madrid or Paris. Generally speaking, there are five types of study abroad scholarships:

**QUICK TIP**

***IIE's [www.studyabroadfunding.org](http://www.studyabroadfunding.org) offers detailed descriptions of hundreds of study abroad scholarships, fellowships, grants and career-oriented internships for U.S. undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students, as well as professionals.***

**Merit-based.** These awards are based on a student's academic, artistic, athletic or other abilities, and often factor in the applicant's extracurricular activities and community service record. Qualifications, however, can vary dramatically between scholarships, so don't assume that just because you don't qualify for one, you won't qualify for others.

**Student-specific.** These scholarships are primarily awarded to individuals who meet certain demographic criteria, typically based on gender, race, religion, family background or ability status. Minority scholarships are the most common variety.

**Destination-specific.** These are scholarships awarded by a country to students planning to pursue a study abroad program in that particular country. They are awarded as an incentive to study in that country rather than somewhere else. Information can be found on sponsored websites of the host country's government.

**Program-specific.** Program-specific scholarships are offered to qualified applicants by individual study abroad programs and/or the colleges and universities that sponsor them. These scholarships are often given on the basis of academic and personal achievement, but qualifications will vary based on the particular scholarship. Information can be found at your study abroad office.

**Subject-specific.** Subject-specific scholarships are awarded by study abroad programs or institutions to students based on their particular major or field of study. These scholarships often require the recipient to enroll in subject-specific courses or conduct subject-specific research while abroad. Again, qualifications will vary based on the individual scholarship.

Most universities with study abroad offices have a wealth of information about the various kinds of scholarships. In addition, advisers may be able to refer you to smaller scholarships that may not offer as much money, but are less competitive, thereby increasing your odds. But it will still be up to you to decide which ones would be best for you to pursue.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I went to a community college that was very study abroad oriented, and it's where I met the professor who encouraged all of his students to study abroad. At this college, I was awarded a \$500 scholarship for writing an essay on why I wanted to study abroad, and I was awarded another \$1,000 for parking cars in the school parking lot on football game days. This is a program that's probably unique to the school, but it's something they do every year to ensure that students can afford to study abroad. It pays to look in all kinds of places.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*If you are interested in pursuing your graduate studies abroad, I suggest looking for schools that are actively recruiting international students. It increases the likelihood of scholarships and general accommodations for foreign students.*

— Cindy Banyai, Michigan State University. Completed graduate studies at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan.

Another great place to start looking for scholarships is IIE's database, [www.studyabroadfunding.org](http://www.studyabroadfunding.org). There you will find hundreds of scholarships and grants for both undergraduates and graduates, including some of the most prestigious ones out there. Many of them are extremely competitive, but if you think that you meet the requirements, go give them a shot!

## U.S. Government-sponsored Scholarships and Fellowships

**Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program** | This program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, provides scholarships to American undergraduates of limited financial means to pursue international education exchange programs, including study abroad, international internships, and service-learning, from four weeks to one academic year for academic credit. Priority is given to those participating in such opportunities in nontraditional locations and students seeking to participate in career-oriented internships abroad. The Gilman International Scholarship Program aims to support students who have been traditionally underrepresented in education abroad, including, but not limited to:

- Students with high financial need
- Students with diverse ethnic backgrounds
- Community college students
- Students with disabilities
- First-generation college students
- Students in underrepresented fields such as sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics
- Students participating in international internships

Annually, the Gilman Scholarship Program awards more than 2,000 grants of up to \$5,000 each. Critical Need Language Awards of \$8,000 each are available for students studying specific targeted languages such as Arabic, Chinese languages, Bahasa Indonesia, Japanese, Korean, Indic languages, Russian, Persian languages,



Turkic languages and Swahili. Several organizations, such as Jay Z's Shawn Carter Foundation, partner with the U.S. Department of State to provide additional Gilman scholarship support to enable their scholarship recipients to study abroad. Other organizations provide students who are awarded the Gilman Scholarship with additional grant money. For example, AIFS provides Gilman scholarship recipients who participate in their programs with an additional \$500 grant. For more information see [www.iie.org/gilman](http://www.iie.org/gilman).

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*I applied for the Gilman Scholarship because it was the only way I would have been able to afford to study abroad. Without it, I never would have been able to go to Japan.*

— Taurean Barnwell, University of South Florida. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Japan.

*One of the major benefits of the Gilman scholarship is that the funds go directly to the student. This came in handy because upon arrival in Ireland I had to clear immigration, which required me to show a bank statement with an available balance higher than \$2,000. Having deposited the Gilman award of \$2,500 in my bank account, I was able to sail through.*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.

**Fulbright U.S. Student Program** | Established by Congress in 1946 and sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Fulbright Program supports educational exchanges that strengthen mutual understanding among the United States and more than 140 participating countries. It is a partnership program in which the U.S. and foreign governments jointly set priorities. Partner governments, corporations, foundations and academic institutions provide additional funding. The Fulbright U.S. Student Program provides funding for one academic year of study, research or teaching abroad. The annual number of Fulbright U.S. Student Program grants awarded is approximately 1,800, including 1,000 study/research grants and about 800 English Teaching Assistantships. For more information see <http://eca.state.gov/Fulbright>.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I was born in Iran, but I grew up in the United States. I graduated from Georgia State University and did research at Georgia Tech. My Fulbright research was in a neural regeneration laboratory in Valencia, Spain. In many ways, my Fulbright year mimicked the same rewards and obstacles I faced growing up. These included the obvious language barrier, the struggle for balance between foreignness and familiarity, and the constant need to reaffirm that decision to move in the first place. They are all manageable hurdles with persistence and dedication. What lies past those challenges is that international spirit that is embodied within the goals of the Fulbright Program: of exchanging knowledge, people, and ideas. These are the true treasures of navigating a new country on a Fulbright grant. My research experience later helped me get a job at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.*

— Yasamin Ebrahimi Rahmani, Georgia State University. Awarded a Fulbright to Spain.

**Fulbright English Teaching Assistantships (ETA)** | Fulbright English Teaching Assistants foster mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and those of more than 65 countries. ETAs help teach English language while serving as cultural ambassadors for U.S. culture. The age and academic level of classroom students varies by country, ranging from kindergarten to university level. Fulbright ETA participants spend one academic year in the host country.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I applied to Slovakia during my senior year of college, based on its location in Central Europe, its history, culture, and the practical statistics behind students applying and receiving the award. I received a monthly stipend from the Fulbright Commission in Slovakia, as well as training and the opportunity to participate in several conferences throughout the year. I'd recommend students that have studied abroad and are thinking about teaching English abroad or those who just want international experience to apply for the ETA Fulbright grant. It is a great chance to live and work in a foreign country for an extended amount of time. Furthermore, the opportunities for cultural immersion are greater in this type of program, because one gets the chance to live and work with the people of the country.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic. Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.

## FULBRIGHT PROGRAM: DID YOU KNOW?

The Fulbright U.S. Student Program offers a wide variety of opportunities. Applicants must have a bachelor's degree or the equivalent before the start of the grant. Many students apply during their senior year, but recent graduates and other professionals are also encouraged to apply. The Fulbright website lists detailed descriptions of all available grants. A few examples include:

**Fulbright-Clinton Fellowships** allow fellows to serve in professional public policy–related placements in foreign government ministries or institutions and to gain hands-on public sector experience in participating foreign countries, while simultaneously carrying out an academic study/research project.

**Fulbright-mtvU awards** were created to support projects that examine an aspect of international musical culture, and focus on contemporary or popular music as a cultural force for expression or change.

**Fulbright-Fogarty Fellowships in Public Health** are offered in a few select countries. They are mostly for medical or graduate students interested in global health issues. The program has recently expanded by adding seven new fellowships.

**Arts grants** are awarded to students with backgrounds in creative and performing arts or creative writing. The grant is used to either practice an art form or to create an artistic work.

**Critical Language Enhancement Awards (CLEA)** provide a supplemental grant to Fulbright U.S. Student recipients who want to start or continue their study and understanding of the language of the host country, for certain languages labeled by the U.S. government as critical need languages.

## Critical Language Scholarships for Intensive Summer Institutes |

A program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) offers fully funded, group-based intensive language instruction and structured cultural enrichment experiences abroad for seven to ten weeks for U.S. citizen undergraduate, master's, and Ph.D. students in thirteen critical needs languages: Arabic, Azerbaijani, Bangla, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Turkish and Urdu. Each language has its own program requirements including language prerequisites. Students of diverse disciplines and majors are encouraged to apply. For more information see [www.clscholarship.org](http://www.clscholarship.org).

### FROM A STUDENT

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*I first fell in love with Russia on a mission trip with my church at the age of 12, and since then, I have had a strong desire to master the language. This pursuit has been quite the uphill battle, though, since my college doesn't offer Russian, nor do I have lots of extra money at my disposal. I discovered the CLS program through a Google search after typing in something to the effect of "study Russian for free," and was ecstatic to be accepted into the summer program. Through CLS, I had a phenomenal, adventurous summer where I grew not only linguistically, but also personally and relationally as well. Linguistically, the program was the most stretching that I have ever experienced; with 20 hours of in-class instruction per week, a pledge to refrain from speaking English on campus, and weekly sessions with a language partner, we were definitely immersed in the language. Speaking in a foreign language at almost all times was one of the most challenging things I've ever done, but my work was richly rewarded: at the end of the summer, I crossed a threshold on the ACTFL speaking scale, moving from an Intermediate High proficiency to Advanced Low.*

— Hope Johnson, Gordon College. Studied abroad in Russia.

**Boren Awards for International Study |** The David L. Boren Scholarships and Fellowships, sponsored by the National Security Education Program, provide funding opportunities for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students to study in world regions critical to U.S. interests and underrepresented in study abroad, including Africa, Asia, Central & Eastern Europe, Eurasia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Boren Scholars and Fellows represent a variety of academic

backgrounds, but all are interested in studying less commonly taught languages, including—but not limited to—Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Swahili. Boren Awards promote long-term linguistic and cultural immersion, and thus the majority of recipients study overseas for at least six months. In exchange for funding, recipients commit to pursuing employment with the federal government. Undergraduate students can apply for a Boren Scholarship, which offers up to \$20,000; graduate students can apply for a Boren Fellowship, with a maximum award of \$30,000. Any American citizen studying at an accredited college or university in the U.S. is eligible. Boren Scholars and Fellows have studied more than 100 languages and countries. The program’s African Languages Initiative provides Boren Scholars and Fellows the opportunity to study Akan/Twi, French, Hausa, Portuguese, Swahili, Yoruba and Zulu. For more information see [www.borenawards.org](http://www.borenawards.org).

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*My Boren Fellowship allowed me to explore my passion for global health and to translate that passion into a career in public service. As a result, I continue to take every opportunity to incorporate cultural learning and exchange into my daily life.*

— Darigg C. Brown, Pennsylvania State University. Studied abroad as Boren Fellow in South Africa.

*My experience in Morocco was very special. I was getting a very nuanced and rich understanding of the language, culture and history that could not be had from just reading and learning in class. And because one of the components of the Boren Fellowship is to give back our talents and experiences in public service to the federal government, I am confident that my overseas experiences, language facility, and strong background in economics will enable me to make contributions to U.S. government efforts to work with other countries and ensure a more peaceful, stable and democratic world.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

**The Language Flagship** | The Language Flagship is an ambitious effort to empower an expanding group of colleges and universities that are implementing new models of language learning to produce college graduates with professional

level (ILR 3, ACTFL Superior) proficiency. Flagship languages include Arabic, Chinese, Hindi-Urdu, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili and Turkish. Flagship Programs set high expectations for participating students of all majors. Regardless of their disciplines, students make language and culture an integral part of their undergraduate academic pursuit. An initiative of the National Security Education Program, The Language Flagship produces global professionals through intensive language instruction in a U.S. university; rigorous, advanced language and culture immersion overseas; direct enrollment in a foreign university offering courses in their field; and in-country professional internships. The Flagship community is made up of 26 Flagship programs at 22 institutions of higher education, and 10 Overseas Flagship Centers. For more information see [www.thelanguageflagship.org](http://www.thelanguageflagship.org).

**U.S. Department of Education** | The Department of Education provides funding to U.S. colleges and universities for several international study opportunities. Check to see if your school offers either the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowships or the Fulbright-Hays grant for doctoral dissertation abroad. FLAS offers academic year and summer fellowships to assist undergraduate students and graduate students undergoing training in modern foreign languages and related area or international studies. Fulbright-Hays funds individual doctoral students to conduct research in other countries in modern foreign languages and area studies for periods of 6 to 12 months. Students who are eligible for either program apply directly to the institutions. For more information see [www.ed.gov/programs](http://www.ed.gov/programs).

## Funding Offered by Private Organizations

Funding is also available from foundations and other sources that support international study and research. A few examples include:

**AIFS Scholarships** | American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) Scholarships are available for both summer and semester study abroad programs. AIFS awards more than \$600,000 in scholarships and grants each year through affiliate grants with your school, international and diversity scholarships, and others. Visit [www.aifsabroad.com](http://www.aifsabroad.com) for a complete list of scholarships and grants.

**Rotary Foundation Scholarships** | The Ambassadorial Scholarships Program of The Rotary Foundation is the world's largest privately funded international scholarships program, having awarded a total of \$532 million to 41,000 men and women since 1947. Beginning in 2013–2014, the Ambassadorial Scholarships program will end, but the Rotary Foundation will continue to offer scholarship opportunities under Future Vision through district grant scholarships (for secondary, undergraduate or graduate students studying locally or abroad), global grant scholarships (for graduate students studying abroad in one of six focus areas) and packaged grant scholarships (one for water and sanitation professionals, the other for student nurses from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda). For more information see [www.rotary.org/en/studentsandyouth/educationalprograms](http://www.rotary.org/en/studentsandyouth/educationalprograms).

**Whitaker International Fellows and Scholars Program** | The Whitaker International Fellows and Scholars program sends emerging leaders in U.S. biomedical engineering (or bioengineering) to undertake a self-designed project that will enhance their own careers within the field. Potential overseas activities could include conducting research at an academic institution, interning at a policy institute, or pursuing postdoctoral research. More than 250 grants have been awarded to fellows and scholars to conduct projects in more than 35 countries worldwide. For more information see [www.whitaker.org](http://www.whitaker.org).

## Scholarships Offered by Foreign Governments or Organizations

Foreign governments and private organizations in other countries also can be a great source of funding for your study abroad. A few examples include:

**German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)** | Scholarships are offered to undergraduate and graduate students from the United States and Canada for both short- and long-term study in Germany. Short-term programs include internships, senior thesis research, and summer courses at German universities. Long-term scholarships are available for either a semester or a year. For more information see [www.daad.org](http://www.daad.org).

**Chinese Government Scholarship Program** | Scholarships offered to non-Chinese undergraduate and graduate students for study in China. All undergraduate studies for international students are instructed in Chinese. Applicants with no command of Chinese are required to take the college preparatory courses for one to two years before pursuing major studies and required to pass an exam before beginning their studies. For more information see [www.csc.edu.cn/laihua](http://www.csc.edu.cn/laihua).

**French Embassy Benjamin Franklin Travel Grant** | A travel grant named after Benjamin Franklin, a philosopher, scientist, diplomat and friend of France, awarded to undergraduate students (sophomores, juniors, seniors) enrolled in American universities when applying. Students must be pursuing a double major in French and one other discipline; applications from students outside of the humanities are encouraged. For more information see <http://highereducation.frenchculture.org/grants-and-fellowships/ben-franklin-grant>.

**US-Japan Bridging Foundation** | This foundation awards scholarships to U.S. undergraduate students to study for one semester or academic year in Japan. The foundation aims to expand the opportunities for study abroad in Japan to help prepare America's young people to assume future global leadership roles. Students must be accepted in a program in Japan, and provide the tuition. Bridging Scholars are chosen by a volunteer committee and awarded scholarships of up to \$5,000 for the academic year, which provide for travel and daily cost-of-living expenses. For more information see [www.bridgingfoundation.org](http://www.bridgingfoundation.org).

## Private Loans

Believe it or not, personal private loans are available for U.S. students studying abroad. Moreover, they're becoming increasingly popular. The primary appeal of a private loan is that it allows you to avoid the high interest rates that inevitably come from using credit cards to pay for study abroad expenses. And the loan can be used for whatever you want it to be used for, including the many smaller expenses for which a credit card is neither practical nor often even accepted. Loans for U.S. students studying overseas fall into two basic categories: personal loans for short-term study abroad and foreign enrolled loans for direct enrollment overseas. Among the organizations that offer these loans are StudyAbroadLoans.com,



InternationalStudentLoans.com, and Sallie Mae. But remember that every dollar must be paid back with interest and that there are occasionally upfront service fees as well. In order to be eligible for one of these loans, students must be enrolled in a university or college affiliated with the organization and have a cosigner. Usually, the study abroad program you are participating in must be affiliated with your college. Shop around for the best deals.

## **Review What's Included in the Program, Including Excursions**

Unfortunately, the cost of studying abroad includes more than just tuition. Before even choosing the type of program and applying for aid, therefore, it is highly recommended that you know exactly what is included in the cost of the program and what isn't. Study abroad offices on campus should be able to provide you with that information, as should the offices of nonaffiliated programs. But invariably it comes down to doing your research by searching online and contacting those in charge of the programs to ask the relevant questions.

Some additional costs inherent in any study abroad program but that might not be included in the official published cost are:

- Housing
- Airfare
- Meals
- Excursions
- Travel within and outside of the country
- Visas and passports
- Books
- Host institution fees
- Immunizations
- International insurance
- Orientation sessions

Some of the things that might not be included in program costs, but are still very important in preparing yourself financially to study abroad, must be budgeted for as well. These include personal travel, mobile phone charges, entertainment and, of course, personal spending money. Be aware that some program providers add a 3 percent fee when using a credit card. This can add \$450 to a \$15,000 semester-long program. In addition, it's always prudent to have emergency back-up funds, just in case. You never know what to expect, even if your entire stay is plotted out for you.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Although it might have cost more, I chose my program because it had the most “frills.” I went on twice as many excursions as my friends in other programs, and I feel as though I gained so much more than they did. I made the most of my time and money abroad by going on every excursion I could!*

— Heather Nelson, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

## Research the Cost of Living in Your Target Location

The cost of living in your potential host country will play a large role in determining how much you end up paying for housing, meals, other quotidian expenses and excursions. It will also impact the amount of spending money you choose to allot for yourself. Obviously, some places will be more expensive than others. For example, the average cost of eating out in China is significantly less—assuming you like to eat mostly Chinese food most days. At the same time, there are some things in China—such as Western-style food and high-end Western clothing brands—that cost more than they do in the UK. Overall, of course, a study abroad program in China is going to end up costing less than one in the UK for nearly all students, but how much less will depend upon your individual needs and spending habits.

The best way to get a handle on the cost of living in your temporary home overseas is to compare the cost of living between the two countries, taking into account the fact that individual cities or regions can be above or below the national level. Study abroad program advisers should be able to provide you with the exchange rates and cost of living statistics for your host country, including those for

food, housing and local transportation. Individuals who have studied abroad in the same location or on the same program recently should also be a good source of practical, on-the-ground information. But be sure to check the latest economic information as things can change rapidly in just a year or two.

Websites, too, can help you compare the cost of items like food, apartment rentals, clothing, water and other incidentals. Some of the more helpful websites include:

- [Expatistan.com](http://Expatistan.com)
- [Numbeo.com](http://Numbeo.com)
- [Databank.worldbank.org](http://Databank.worldbank.org)

It's also a good idea to look at the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI shows yearly—and sometimes monthly—fluctuations of prices for an acquired basket of goods and services that includes food and beverages, housing, clothing, transportation and education. The World Bank has excellent CPI data from country to country, but they give their numbers in percentages, so you'll have to use the cost of living index to help you figure out the rate at which prices are decreasing and increasing. Although it may sound like a lot of math, it's an important lesson to learn: currency and cost of living fluctuations can have a direct impact on the quality of your life abroad. If you have a general idea of how inflation is affecting your host country and the value of the dollar, you'll have a better understanding of how much additional money you will probably need.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Cost was one of the most important factors in my selection; the Czech Republic was more affordable than other locations because of its currency and the exchange rate. I also chose the Czech Republic because of my love for WWII and Cold War history. I would urge students to choose a place that is intellectually interesting, but also cost effective. You'll be able to take more trips and have more experiences if you're less worried about every koruna or euro you spend.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I saved money by studying in a country with a high currency exchange rate, took advantage of hostels when traveling, bargained for everything, and always used Ryanair or Easyjet when traveling internationally.*

— Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.

## Look for Ways to Save Money on the Ground

Housing is a critical component of every studying abroad program: after all, you have to have someplace to live! The most likely options include:

- International dorms
- Standard university dorms
- Apartments
- Hostels/hotels
- Homestay

If money is a big concern, consider a homestay. Host families can be a great way to immerse yourself in everyday culture and language, including learning about intergenerational family life. In addition to generally being much cheaper overall, homestays often include meals and laundry, so you won't have to set aside additional money for those. However, homestays can present some significant potential problems. Your room might not be nearly as comfortable or private as you would like, and you can't always count on quiet study time in the evening. Moreover, you have to abide by the family's house rules, including curfew, alcohol and guests. You may not be able to come and go as you please. These factors shouldn't dissuade you from a homestay option, though. After all, living with a family in accordance with their customs and practices will give you valuable additional insights into the local culture. However, you should check with the program and fellow students, as experiences can vary.

## QUICK TIP



***If your study abroad program does not provide housing, allow yourself plenty of time to research your options and arrange it. Talk with students who have studied in your chosen program or in the same city, and find out what has worked for other students.***

Many programs enable students to live in apartments or hostels off campus. Slightly different from dorms, apartments offer greater flexibility and freedom, but also come with landlords, deposits and roommates who may be students, or not. Renter's insurance is a good idea if you're going this route because it can protect you from damage to the apartment, as well as your personal items. Hostels can be a bit more expensive because they usually offer more amenities, but you just might want laundry service, room cleaning, and opportunities to mix with fellow travelers, not just students. This approach often works for programs that have students moving about from one city to the next. For more detailed descriptions of housing, check out Chapter 3.

What and how you eat is another opportunity to save money, potentially lots of it. Whether you opt for the meal plan at your host institution, cook your own food in an apartment, or rely upon eating out—even at local “dives”—food costs add up. Preparing your own meals is the best way to save money, especially in countries where the cost of living is relatively high and the currency exchange rate isn't particularly favorable. If you are fortunate enough to live in a dorm with a kitchen or in an apartment with people from your host country, learning how to prepare local cuisine could benefit you in the long run, and be more enjoyable than going out to eat with those friends every other night. Plus, buying your food in local markets can be lots of fun! But don't neglect to eat out as often as you can justify it, not only for the sake of sampling foods that you won't be able to prepare yourself, but also for the sake of the overall cultural experience. Generally speaking, lunches are cheaper than dinners.

## WAYS TO SAVE MONEY

Housing and food are the two biggest expenses, but here are some other tips to keep in mind when it comes to saving money on the ground:

- **Bargain! Haggle! Negotiate!** In countries where bargaining is the cultural norm, never pay the first price on any negotiable product or service. Once you've been there for a week or two, you'll come to know what the "real" prices are. Until then, ask others you can trust.
- Always ask about **student discounts**, as they are often not posted (and be sure to have your student ID with you at all times).
- Use **Skype** to keep in touch with family and friends.
- Use your **mobile phone smartly** (or not at all). Check into limited international calling, texting and data plans and, if they're too expensive to use while traveling, consider using a local prepaid SIM card and free (or low-cost) Internet access in public cafés to stay connected using email and social media. See Chapter 5 for more information on mobile phones.
- Be **smart about transportation**. Use public transportation instead of taxis whenever possible; walk or ride a bike whenever feasible.
- **Track your expenses**. Once you see the cost of things spent on paper, you're more likely to modify your behavior.
- Check out **organized excursion packages** before signing up. Sometimes they are cheaper (or the convenience is worth the premium), but sometimes you can find much better alternative deals on your own.
- **Live like a local**. Ask around for places to eat and shop outside the tourist zone. Many countries have central markets that sell fresh fruits and vegetables or bulk cooking items. They also often have food stalls that offer cheap lunch options.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Costa Rica has a lot of “central markets,” which are just like open-air markets with stalls, but housed in a building that is open every day. My friend used to take me to the one in my city (every town had one or two) to get a cheap lunch. Also, my host parents would take me to the weekly farmers market, where avocados were about a dollar (500 colones) for a kilo, and I was able to try fruits that I’d never even seen before. Most of the vendors were excited to see that I wasn’t familiar with the food and offered me free samples. Definitely cheap and healthy eating!*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

*I also always used cash for everything. It helped me manage my spending.*

— Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.

*When you first arrive in a new place, it’s a great time to establish new habits, especially spending habits. Sit down, set out a budget for the month, and then actually track your spending to see how closely you are following it. This will make it easier to do things like spend less day to day so you can actually afford to go on those trips that you can only go on when abroad.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

## Tips for Managing Your Money Abroad

- **Set a budget.** Before traveling abroad, create a budget for yourself in the currency of the host country. Monitor your spending as you go, especially to see that you aren’t way over budget, especially since, as a first-timer, you may find yourself falling into the trap many do: spending more money than you realize because the currency is different and it somehow seems less like “real money.” If you are, slam on the brakes. And if you are proceeding under budget, assign the savings to a special item you’d like to buy but didn’t think you could afford, or to an excursion you’d like to add on.
- **Use cash whenever possible.** Cash is king in most of the world, and as such, it gives you greater bargaining power and frees you from having to pay any financial service charges. If using U.S. dollars, be sure to have small bills, and carry local currency in small denominations as well.

- **Use ATMs wisely.** Instead of bringing one or two semesters' worth of cash with you, rely on an ATM card (have a backup in case a machine somewhere eats your card) to take out lump sums in order to minimize fees. Let your bank know beforehand of your impending travels so the bank doesn't suspect fraud and freeze your account. Also inquire about limits and fees before you leave. (If you have a Citibank, Bank of America or HSBC account, your transaction fees may be waived if you use one of their partner banks; it's worth the time to check it out.) Use your ATM inside banks or secure areas as much as possible (be on the look-out for cameras trained on you and the keypad), and refrain from using them after dark or if you've been out partying.
- **Bring preloaded cards.** Consider bringing bank debit or American Express gift cards—the ones that require you to show your passport—with you, loaded in increments of \$200. You can set up a system with a family member to transfer additional money to the cards at predetermined times. Check to make sure the cards will work in your host country.



#### QUICK TIP

***Check with your bank and credit card provider before you leave to find out if they have any added fees for use outside the United States.***

- **Use credit cards wisely.** Although safer overall than carrying cash, using a credit card often incurs additional fees. Before you leave, therefore, find out about your credit card issuer's policies. If the fees are too high, consider signing up for Capital One, which does not charge a currency conversion fee, or any one of the credit cards that NerdWallet lists and updates on its site. Keep in mind, however, that many merchants abroad pass on their credit card fee to you by charging an additional two to four percent on top of your purchase. Be sure to ask. Don't leave home without at least two credit cards and a debit card,



and make sure that you have photocopies of them, save them in a secure place online, and/or write down the numbers in case they are lost or stolen.

- **Do not keep all your cash or credit cards on you.** Store some in a safe place in your room or in various places in your luggage along with your back-up credit card or ATM card. Use a safe when traveling or when staying in a hostel. Store cash in various places on your person: most in a secure wallet or small purse tied around your neck or in a money belt. To avoid flashing cash in public places, stuff a few small bills/coins in your front pockets or a small change purse for small, quick purchases, such as food from street vendors or bus fares.

#### QUICK TIP



***The most common regret of overseas students? Not keeping track of expenses as they went, so as to see how quickly they were adding up.***

- **Set up bill payments back home.** Set up automatic online payments to your monthly or quarterly service providers, or ask a family member to make payments on your behalf. If you need to make a payment while abroad, make sure that the site you're using is completely secure and don't save your password if you're using a shared computer.
- **Make money.** Consider how you can make money—small jobs, teaching English, paid internships—not only to earn extra cash, but also to expand your in-country experience. Keep in mind that you must be scrupulous about following local labor laws and only work if your program allows it. Due to local laws many internship opportunities are unpaid. In that case, you should think about the long-term benefits; having an international internship on your résumé increases your employability upon graduation.

- **Exchange services.** Swapping skills or even sharing items can minimize costs. For example, if you're interested in learning a language but don't have the money for a course, consider swapping English lessons for local language lessons.

## Working or Interning (Legally!) While Abroad

If you're able to work or intern while you're abroad, by all means do it! Internships abroad are a growing area in education abroad, and they are not only in the purview of study abroad offices. You can also seek guidance from your academic department or career services department, which often work with the private sector to arrange internships for their students. More often than ever before, universities are reaching out to their alumni to develop internship opportunities for their students. If they are paid, internships can also be a great way to partially offset the cost of studying abroad, as well as to put some extra spending money in your pocket. First, of course, you'll want to make sure that working is an option, and if so, under what circumstances or limitations. This can usually be ascertained before you depart, but not always. Naturally, some countries are going to be more permissive than others, but whatever the rules are, be sure you follow them. Getting caught working illegally can potentially jeopardize your student visa.

If working is allowed, then the next step is to figure out if you even have the time to do so. Working typically necessitates waiting a couple of weeks to get a feel for what your academic demands are going to be. If you find that you do have the time, the next step is actually finding a job, and finding one relatively quickly. Generally speaking, the most readily obtainable jobs are in the service industry or in office work. Internships in business fields will be harder to come by, and they might not be paid. But if one of your main objectives is to get some international work experience, this still might be worthwhile. Check out the possibility of working abroad in more detail in Chapter 8. If you are unable to find a paid internship but find one that suits your long-term career interests, consider looking at scholarship sources on or off campus, such as the Gilman International Scholarship discussed earlier in this chapter, that may help you cover your living expenses while doing an unpaid internship.

## Listen to Those Who Know

Talk to other students who have gone before (several if possible) to find out how much things really cost and how much they really spent above and beyond the “posted” price of the study abroad program. Advice specific to the country you’re visiting or the currency you’ll be using will be especially helpful. But don’t just accept everything you hear. Each person will have his or her own experiences, and not everyone’s advice will fit you. For example, some travelers would recommend going on all the pre-packaged excursions you can to see as much of the country as possible, no matter what the cost. Others may recommend that you spend more time getting to know the city you live in and the people there, as you’ll have a richer cultural experience and probably spend less. Neither is right or wrong in an absolute sense; it all depends on your own personal study abroad goals and budget.



# TOP TIPS

## **Top 10 Tips to Make Study Abroad More Affordable**

1. *Start saving money today.*
2. *Determine whether you can apply your financial aid to your study abroad program.*
3. *Research study abroad scholarships, including those from your own college.*
4. *If feasible, pursue destinations off the beaten track.*
5. *Opt for a short course if your budget requires it.*
6. *Review what's included in the overall program, including excursions, and go for the no-frills options.*
7. *Research the cost of living in your target location and budget for currency fluctuations.*
8. *Look for ways to save money on the ground.*
9. *If possible, work or intern while abroad (but follow the law!).*
10. *Listen to the advice and experience of those who have been there and done that.*

CHAPTER 5

## Preparing to Study Abroad

Once you have decided on the where and what, you still have a lot to accomplish in the months ahead, and waiting until the last minute is always a big mistake. In addition to completing your application on time, applying for or renewing your passport, and securing any necessary visas, you should also start considering the intellectual, emotional and physical aspects of your upcoming study abroad experience. Not surprisingly, the better organized you are, the better prepared you'll be to put your best international foot forward once you're there.

Preparing, though, is more than just buying your ticket, selecting your courses, and saying goodbye to your friends and family. Moving to another country, under any circumstances and for any length of time, is serious business. You must take it upon yourself to research the country, culture and people so that you have the essential knowledge and information that will enable your study abroad experience to live up to your expectations. Unfortunately, not nearly enough students are offered or receive sufficient cross-cultural training before departing, thus hampering their ability to engage quickly and effectively in their new country. Even if you are going for a full year, time is precious.

Another important part of predeparture preparation is involving your parents or close relatives. Ideally, you've already been conferring with them throughout the process and sharing your thoughts, aspirations and concerns. If you haven't, now is definitely the time to do so—before you commit and sign any contracts. Don't underestimate the value of their input, assistance and support. Moreover, since

you are leaving U.S. soil and venturing to a new place with different laws and health-care systems, you may at some point need their help. The more information they have before you leave, the better they'll be able to help you once you are far away.



#### QUICK TIP

***If you've missed the application deadline for your preferred program, all may not be lost. Some programs extend the deadline, especially for the sake of filling up the program. Call or ask your study abroad office to check. Then be prepared to hustle to get ready!***

## Complete Your Application on Time

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the process of considering, reviewing and selecting the study abroad program that's right for you is complicated. You should already have weighed all the pros and cons, made sure that you meet any and all eligibility requirements, and confirmed that the program you have chosen matches your personal and academic objectives. Now that you have, make sure you complete the application on time and to the best of your ability, including having persuasive personal references, and without any grammatical mistakes or typographical errors. If you have any special needs, disabilities, or important health information, make sure you include that as well. Your adviser will then know how best to accommodate your needs. Make a note of the date you submit your application, and, if you haven't heard back within a month or so, contact the program leader or your adviser to see if you can get a status update.

Once you've been accepted, you'll need to complete your acceptance paperwork, which usually includes a legally binding contract. Be sure to read the entire contract carefully, especially payment and refund policies.

## FROM AN EDUCATOR

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*The application process for studying abroad can seem daunting. Students should not underestimate how much time is needed to complete the application process. My observation over the years has been that students who start planning in their freshman year for a semester abroad in their junior year find the process to be less stressful and not so overwhelming.*

— Nancy Cave, coordinator, study abroad program, Manhattan College.

You're now ready to select your study abroad courses. Be sure to solicit the appropriate on-campus approval before submitting your choices to your overseas university. Since every college has its own procedure for approving coursework and credit transfer, it is imperative that you work with your advisers to preapprove courses. The last thing you want is to find any unpleasant surprises when you return. Make sure you bring the contact information of your adviser, and an alternative just in case. For more information on credit transfer, see Chapter 2.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I took courses that were equivalent to those in my home university curriculum. It's important to obtain your college/department's approval of the courses you want to take abroad to ensure that you will be able to receive credit. To initiate this process, I determined the courses that I would take for that semester based on my degree curriculum. My department chair, college chair and dean then had to ensure the courses were equivalent and approve them in order for me to receive credit (which I did). I did all of this prior to studying abroad.*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.  
Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.

## Secure Necessary Documentation

In order to travel outside the United States, you need to have a valid passport. Depending on where you are going, you may also need a visa. Passports are issued by the country of which you are a citizen, and are the only document universally recognized around the world as verification of your citizenship. U.S. passports

expire after 10 years if issued at the age of 16 or older, but after only five years if issued before age 16. An added wrinkle, however, is that your passport generally must be valid for at least six months beyond the date of your return. If not, you will need to get a new one. Since it is a federally issued government document, you expose yourself to possible prosecution under the law if you mutilate or alter your passport in any way. Take very good care of your passport!

#### FROM A STUDENT

*My top tip to students is to plan ahead. I did not have a passport prior to being interested in study abroad so I had to obtain one. This process takes a while!*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.  
Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.



#### QUICK TIP

***Apply for or renew your passport as early as possible, since you never know what can delay the process.***

## Applying for a Passport

Getting a passport is probably easier than you think, but it takes time and you must have certain documents, such as proof of citizenship and photos of a specified size. Delivery times vary based on the time of year. For example, it may take longer to get your passport closer to the summer when more people travel and realize they need to renew one or obtain a new passport. You can check the State Department's website for average process rates. Should you need your passport sooner than the standard four to eight weeks, an expedited service is available (for an additional fee) that reduces the delivery time to five working days. Overnight delivery charges will also cost more, but are recommended to ensure timely delivery if you're not able to pick up your passport in person. For detailed instructions and information, go to the U.S. Department of State's website on passports.



## Renewing, Replacing or Amending Your Passport

If you already have a valid passport, check the expiration date. If it expires within six months after your projected return you will still need to get a new passport as many countries require that much cushion before issuing you a visa. Some airlines will even deny you boarding. If your previous passport was issued on or after your 16th birthday, you should be able to renew it by mail.

### QUICK TIP



***Make sure a close relative also has a valid passport while you are studying abroad. This will make a huge difference should an emergency arise.***

If your passport is lost or stolen while you're in the United States, you can apply for a replacement one using the official "Lost or Stolen Passport" form. If your passport is lost or stolen outside the United States, you must report the loss immediately to local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. If you can provide your passport number and two color photos, your replacement passport will be issued faster, usually within a day or so, depending on the embassy or consulate.

If you have legally changed your name, you must amend your passport. You will need to fill out a "Passport Amendment/Validation" form and submit it along with proof of your name change (e.g., marriage certificate, divorce decree, adoption decree, court order). This usually doesn't cost anything unless you require expedited service.

## Getting a Visa

A visa is an official stamp, seal or document affixed in your passport that allows you to enter a foreign country for a certain amount of time and for a specific purpose. Countries may give visas for tourism, study, work or other purposes. As a U.S. citizen, you can determine if you need a visa by visiting the website of the

country you're visiting, or go to the U.S. State Department's website and click on "Country Specific Information." In most developed countries with good relations with the United States, visas are typically stamped in your passport upon arrival, unless you are staying for an extended period, such as studying for a semester or two. You should never just assume you can travel without a visa. If obtaining a visa before you depart is required—and your program should tell you if it is—it is up to you to obtain it. Depending on the country and your access to one of its consulates, this may take anywhere between a week and several months, and can sometimes be a tedious process. Moreover, you must already have a valid passport before you can apply. To apply for a visa, you must complete that country's application form, supplying all requested information, required photos, and occasionally even your roundtrip air ticket. The possession of a visa is not in itself a guarantee of entry into the country that issued it, and a visa can be revoked at any time.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I studied abroad in France and my visa advice to others planning to study there is apply early! There are quite a few steps in the process, and the slightest thing can halt the process. Be persistent, and ask questions. Once in France it's not difficult to extend your visa, but it's your responsibility to make sure it gets done. No one is going to call you and follow up!*

— Amy Newman, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in France.

## Confirm Your Travel Plans

Once you have submitted your acceptance, it's time to begin making travel plans. To be sure, there's something especially exciting about finally having a definite date and destination! No longer are you just imagining, you're actually choosing the flight you will take and where you will live.

## Book Your Flight and Transportation

If you're going abroad with your college or any U.S.-based program, your outbound travel arrangements will probably be taken care of for you, though you may have a few options to determine such as departure city or preferred airline. If you need to make your own arrangements, however, you will need to do so as soon as

possible, particularly if you will be traveling during peak tourist season. Regardless of whether you're buying your own ticket or going with a group, be sure to inquire about the possibility of leaving your return open ended so that you have the option of staying on after the program to travel on your own. In any case, your return trip should always be scheduled a few days after your final exam, as you will need time to both pack up and complete any administrative or physical obligations, such as cleaning out your apartment.

If your travel arrangements are being made for you, the price will probably be predetermined and there may not be anything you can do about it. (Rest assured, however: most organized programs already have arrangements with various carriers and so the price you will be paying is probably less than what you could get on your own.) But if you are buying your own ticket, there are many ways to proactively save money. Begin by checking out a wide variety of online ticket dealers and travel agencies, including [YAPTA.com](http://YAPTA.com) and [Kayak.com](http://Kayak.com). Look into any student discounts you're eligible for using either an international student ID (see above) or [StudentUniverse.com](http://StudentUniverse.com) or [STATravel.com](http://STATravel.com). In any case, start looking as early as possible for the best deals because sometimes, if you have the luxury of planning six or more months in advance, you can get significant discounts. It pays to do your research and plan as far ahead as possible.

If you are part of a group, make sure that you confirm the meeting place, as large international airports can be quite overwhelming. In addition, international flights often arrive at similar times, the result of which is that passengers from different flights become mixed together as they enter passport control. Under those circumstances, it is easy to become separated from anyone you may be travelling with.

If you are traveling alone or not part of an organized pick-up, it's wise to research your travel options from the airport to your destination prior to boarding the plane. But don't be surprised if you find alternative options once you've landed. Investigate your options for getting to your destination before you leave the baggage claim and customs area since you cannot return to it once you have. It's almost always more conducive to making a good decision than the chaos that typically awaits passengers either in the arrival hall or outside the terminal. If you will be taking a taxi or public bus, be on the lookout for an official tourist kiosk or ask someone at a bank or store for practical help, such as advice on the price of a taxi, bus service availability, or express train service. This is especially the case in developing

countries where prices are not set and vendors commonly attempt to charge higher prices to tourists.

#### FROM A STUDENT

*I arrived in Beijing at 6:30 a.m. after two long flights and a layover in Kuala Lumpur. I was to be met by affiliates of the Global Youth Leadership Summit (GYLS) there, but after strolling the length of the suspiciously small terminal, it was clear that I had no welcome party. Within a few steps, a familiar voice caught my ear. Well, I thought it was familiar—it turns out ANYTHING I could understand sounded familiar. There was a Western couple standing in front of the arrival board, arguing in French. I didn't know what to do and so hung around my new friends. When we started talking about Australia, and how I had just come from there, Aimée said, "Oh that's funny. Your flight landed at the domestic terminal." Now that I thought of it, I hadn't gone through customs. I decided that my GYLS group must be waiting at the international terminal so I caught a trolley to the other terminal and found my group. I never did figure out why my international flight disembarked at the wrong terminal.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

### U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT'S SMART TRAVELER ENROLLMENT PROGRAM (STEP)

Two to three weeks before you leave, register for Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) on the U.S. State Department website. It's easy to do: just fill in your name, where you're going and for how long, and how to get in touch with you. The State Department will use this information to send you important security or emergency messages, whenever warranted. These could include safety alerts (strikes, civil disturbances, protests), health warnings (disease outbreaks), and significant changes in bilateral relations. If you plan on traveling beyond your host country, simply update your STEP profile to reflect your new dates and destinations. You should use STEP if you travel during your time abroad and continue to use STEP after you've graduated. You can even download the free "Smart Traveler" app at the State Department website.

## Select Housing

Since space is often limited in campus dorms, don't wait until the last minute to sign up if this is the way you want to go. Homestays and apartments require planning, and often interviews as well. If you plan on winging it and finding housing once you land, you should at least have prepared a short list of options before you arrive. For more on housing, see Chapter 3.

## Taking Care of Business

As a student, you probably aren't yet actively engaged in the full adult world of personal and financial responsibilities. But there are still some things from that realm that do affect you and that you will need to take care of while you are overseas. Not surprisingly, it is going to be a lot harder to do this abroad than at home, and in some cases, it will actually be impossible. So don't wait until the last minute to come up with plans for filing taxes, voting, renewing credit cards, purchasing insurance or any other similar tasks. A list of potential concerns is provided below.

- **Documents.** Make several copies of all important documents that you will take with you. Leave one of them with a trusted family member or friend at home. Scan and save them to your hard drive, or upload them to a secure location to ensure digital access. Important documents include your passport, visa (if applicable), credit/debit cards (both the number and the contact information), and emergency contact information on the ground in your new country: the 911 equivalent, U.S. embassy or consulate, and emergency services for your home and host institutions.
- **Insurance.** Unfortunately, bad things can happen when traveling. Do your homework and talk with your study abroad adviser to determine if the program includes insurance and, if so, what type of coverage. Also consult with your parents about whether you need additional insurance coverage.
- **Medical.** Most U.S. insurance policies do not cover you while you are abroad, and many overseas hospitals will demand cash before they either treat or release you. Therefore, most travelers recommend having major medical, medical evacuation and repatriation insurance.

**QUICK TIP**

***Many study abroad programs offer medical insurance, but students must complete the necessary paperwork on time to be covered.***

- **Non-medical evacuation insurance.** Most study abroad programs will include non-medical evacuation insurance, in case of natural disasters or political instability. But you should research and consider buying this type of insurance if you are enrolling directly in a university overseas.
- **Property.** Find out if your (or your parents') existing property insurance (homeowner's, renter's or personal property) covers loss or theft.
- **Travel.** Look into travel insurance and determine if you're covered by your study abroad program, your credit card company, or travel agent. If not, you'll want to weigh the pros and cons of buying additional travel insurance.
- **Legal affairs.** If you have a will, make sure that it's up-to-date and that a trusted family member has a copy. (If you don't have one, now would be a good time to create one.) Consider designating power of attorney to a trusted family member or friend before you leave so that he or she can take care of any legal matters that may arise while you're away.
- **Voting.** If elections are scheduled in your locality while you're away, you can still vote via absentee ballot. But in many states you must sign up to receive an absentee ballot before you leave. Check with local election officials to find out how to do this.
- **Taxes.** Being overseas is not an accepted excuse for not filing your taxes. So if you are going to be abroad during tax season, you will need to make arrangements to do so. The forms you will need can generally be found on the Internet, but the records you will need to complete them may only be accessible at home, and it may not be worth the risk of having them sent to you. In that case, you

will probably be best served by just filing for an automatic extension, which—for federal taxes at least—gives you an automatic six-month extension to send in your completed forms. Be aware, however, that the request for an automatic extension must still be filed before April 15th and that you must submit with it a check covering all that you expect to owe.

- **Registrations.** Take care of all registrations, big and small, before you leave, including registering your travel plans with the U.S. State Department STEP program (see above), registering automatic bill payments online, signing up for classes and housing on your home campus for the following semester, forwarding your mail, and notifying your bank and credit card companies of your upcoming international travel.
- **Renewals.** Check expiry dates and renew, if appropriate, your passport, driver's license, ATM/credit/debit cards, and other items that cannot be easily renewed online.

## Take Care of Your Health

No matter how long you'll be gone or where you're going, it behooves you to take care of any medical arrangements well in advance of your departure, whether you need a simple decongestant prescription refill to get you through two weeks in Paris or a battery of vaccinations to protect you during a nine-month sojourn in India. Vaccinations in particular can often take anywhere from a few weeks to several months to get, especially if they must be taken in a set sequence. Consult this short list below to make sure you leave medically prepared:

- **Get a checkup** before you leave for the sake of updating your medical records and prescriptions.
- **Arrange to get necessary vaccinations** and travel prescriptions (check out the CDC information below).
- **Fill any prescriptions** for one month longer than your time abroad (including those for contact lenses), pack your medication in your carry-on bag, and carry your prescriptions in their labeled containers, not in a pill pack.
- **If you wear glasses, bring a spare pair** and a copy of your prescription.

- **Bring copies of essential medical records**, including prescriptions, blood type, allergy information and vaccination records if available.
- **Bring vitamins and over-the-counter medicines** that you think you may need, as other countries do not have the same pharmaceutical services and regulations as the United States.
- **Confirm that your prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines are legal** in your host country, and if they aren't discuss options with your doctor and study abroad advisers.
- **Indicate any and all specific personal health needs** (medications, equipment, counseling, access to treatment, etc.) on your application to ensure you get the support you need and that the host country has access to those services or the equivalent.
- **Bring a small first-aid kit**, supplemented by items specific to your geographic area, such as sunscreen, insect repellent, respiratory mask, or snake-bite kit.
- **Research your destination to prepare against getting sick from food, drink or pollution.** In many developing countries, tap water is not purified and milk and its byproducts are not pasteurized, so take care to drink only bottled water and stay away from raw fresh fruits and vegetables you cannot peel. You may want to go slowly with spicy foods in some countries as your body learns to get used to the heat. Some major cities have very high pollution rates, so if you have respiratory issues, you might want to avoid them.
- **Consider any mental health needs you may have**, and carefully research what services are available in the countries where you might wish to study abroad, as health and mental health services vary widely from country to country. Consult with the health services providers on your campus or in your community to clarify counseling and medication services that might be available abroad, and be sure to plan ahead for any anticipated need for mental health treatment.

While study abroad offers many positive benefits in terms of personal growth, living and studying in a completely unfamiliar environment can also be somewhat stressful. It is not at all unusual to experience some form of culture shock when you arrive in your host country. There are a number of resources to help students prepare for and adjust to the transitions involved in study abroad, such as



“Maintaining Strong Mental and Emotional Health”, the Center for Global Education’s adaptation of a Peace Corps handbook on this topic, and there is a section on culture shock in Chapter 6 of this book. However, if you experience severe symptoms of anxiety, depression or stress that make it difficult for you to cope with your new surroundings, or if you experience a traumatic event while abroad, you should contact your program’s health services or a licensed medical provider to seek professional evaluation and care.

## Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

The CDC website offers comprehensive health and medical information for travelers. If you’re an old hand, you’ve probably used the CDC website before, and we encourage you to do so again. If you’ve never used it, we strongly recommend that you check out the site well before your departure as it offers great tips on staying healthy abroad, as well as information on what to do if you become ill or injured. You’re probably aware that the United States offers one of the world’s highest standards of disease prevention and medical care; diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, cholera and diphtheria have been eradicated or are extremely uncommon. But these diseases still exist in many parts of the developing world. It is critically important, therefore, for you to research disease prevalence in the country you’ll be staying in, and take the proper preventative care.

Using the CDC site is easy; it’s broken down into the following sections:

- **Destinations:** an interactive world map that shows health information for travel to more than 200 destinations and includes the sites of recent disease outbreaks.
- **Vaccinations:** an overview of the types of vaccinations required and/or recommended and the necessary timeframe.
- **Travel Clinics:** state-by-state listings of travel clinics, as well as recommendations for private travel medical clinic sources.
- **Ill or Injured Abroad:** detailed information on what steps to take and who to contact in case of a medical emergency.
- **Stay Healthy and Safe:** tips on being proactive, prepared, and protected while abroad.

## Think Globally

A final and very important area in which you can prepare yourself for going abroad consists of intellectual, social and psychological preparation. In Chapter 1, we briefly discussed the importance of developing a global mindset—the ability to work successfully across cultures (though not necessarily in another country)—to best prepare you to operate in a global world. Developing a global mindset requires you to think globally about your schoolwork, your friends, the foods you eat, the news you read, the clubs you join, your communication skills, and your future. In essence, a global mindset is an open-minded perspective on the world and its people, places, ideas and events. And it's not just about thinking big thoughts in your dorm room, but also about actively investigating new cultures, practicing a language, learning about a new culture, questioning the news, and being curious about people you've never met and places you've never been. We'll address these topics in detail in the rest of this chapter as well as in the full Chapter 6.

### TIPS FOR ENHANCING YOUR GLOBAL PERSONA

- Pay attention to world events and international news.
- Monitor global business trends and stock markets.
- Learn to think globally and cross-culturally.
- Cultivate listening skills and other personal skills that enhance cross-cultural interaction.
- Learn or practice a second language.
- Monitor relevant apps and blogs.
- Follow national news online for the country you're going to.
- Join local and virtual international clubs.
- Make friends with international students on your home campus.
- Pay attention to hot regions and issues you care about.

## Get to Know Your New Country

One of the most exciting aspects of studying abroad is living someplace completely different. But to get the most out of your experience, you must prepare for your international adventure as if you were taking a final exam. Do your research and gather information on your destination so as to ensure basic familiarity with everything from geography and climate to current events and pop culture. The more you know beforehand, the better prepared you'll be to understand and cope with the differences. The following list should give you a good place to start.

- Current events
- Customs and culture (social situations/etiquette)
- Politics and economics
- History and religion
- Geography and climate

### FROM A STUDENT

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*Part of my assignment for the courses I took on all of my study abroad trips required me to interview locals on their feelings and perceptions of America. From what I noticed, it's kind of a split between people thinking we're fat and rude, to people thinking we're nice and misguided.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*When I was in Spain, I told a group of friends that I was from "America," referring to the United States. I was promptly corrected to "United States of America." In the proper sense of the word, people living in South, Central, and North America are all Americans. This event led me to think deeply about the root and accuracy of the words that we use to identify ourselves and others. Even though this was a seemingly trivial, yet accurate, correction it had an important implication for me. In the face of a globalized world, we have to be cognizant of the accuracy and potential interpretations of our words, whether they are used to identify ourselves or to refer to others.*

— Amarylis Velez-Perez, University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez.  
Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Spain.

## FROM A STUDENT

*During my orientation, I received lectures on the relationship between Morocco and the United States. They helped a great deal.*

— Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.

**MONEY**

Now that you've chosen your destination, it's certainly not worth wasting any of your precious time abroad to be constantly worrying about minor ups and downs. While exchange rates do fluctuate, it is unlikely that there will be any major changes during the course of your time overseas. So familiarize yourself with the general concept of how much the local currency is worth in relation to the U.S. dollar. Learn how to say monetary amounts, even if you don't know the language, to be better prepared and minimize rip-offs. Take the time to get a feel for approximately how much certain benchmark amounts (e.g., \$1, \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100) are worth in the local currency (and vice versa) before you leave so that you aren't caught unawares when you first arrive. Sites like Oanda and XE offer quick currency conversion, or X-Rates can help with quick comparison calculations. If the conversion is a tricky one or there is a real danger of losing track of a digit should the currency—like the Vietnamese dong or Paraguayan guaraní—be in the hundreds or thousands to the dollar, you might consider downloading a currency app that works on your smartphone.

## U.S. Department of State

A good place to start your research is the State Department website's section on "International Travel," which provides information on every country in the world. On this site you'll find the location of the U.S. embassy and any consular offices, visa requirements, crime and security information, health and medical conditions, localized hot spots, the name of the U.S. ambassador, and a fact sheet on bilateral relations. If you're interested in learning about regional issues, you can search for such information in one of the six bureaus: Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Eurasia, the Near East, South and Central Asia, and the Western Hemisphere.

### QUICK TIP



***Check out the State Department's one-stop online resource for college-age students traveling abroad: [studentsabroad.state.gov](https://studentsabroad.state.gov)***

You can also find information on human rights and international religious freedom in each country, as well as read the information contained in the Country Studies Series produced by the Federal Research Division of the U.S. Library of Congress. This series of full-length books presents an in-depth description and analysis of the history and the social, economic, political and security systems of the majority of the world's countries, with each country the subject of its own volume. They can be downloaded at no charge from the Library of Congress website. These in-depth books offer extensive historical background but are not currently being updated; be sure to use the State Department country fact sheets mentioned above for current information.

## Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook

The CIA World Factbook is a treasure trove of information. Included for each country are brief summaries of the history and people, including language, religion, literacy rates and demographic statistics. In addition, there is basic geographical information, including country maps and regional maps, for context, climate and terrain. You can find information on government structure, the legal system, national holidays and/or day of independence, a description and picture of the national flag, the national symbol, and even the words to the national anthem. The economic overview provides a concise description, followed by hallmark statistics such as GDP, unemployment, taxes, imports and exports, and currency exchange rates. Also included is information on transportation, energy, communications, military, and any transnational issues relevant to the United States. A handy reference tab includes maps of world regions, flags of the world, a physical map of the world, a political map of the world, a map of world oceans, and a world time zone map.

## Travel Guides

Travel guides are an indispensable source of information that are equally useful before, during, and even after your time abroad. Travel guides complement the serious, yet important source material noted above, but focus primarily on the needs and concerns of tourists. You can learn a bit about the people and cultural context of a country, sights to see and things to do, as well as get a preparatory sense for what it's like to actually be there. You'll find practical tips on taking local transportation, how best to bargain for those gifts you simply must buy, the location of good, cheap food, and the names of books, music and apps that will enhance your time in the country.

You may also learn some very practical information that you won't find anywhere else. For instance, did you know that in many developing countries, the sewage system can't handle toilet tissue, and that, as a result, it must be put in a wastebasket? Or that in Muslim countries it's considered an insult to eat with your left hand? (The left hand is used for hygiene and considered unclean.) Giving the thumbs-up or the "okay" sign are considered obscene in some places, so it's best to avoid these gestures unless you are sure they're acceptable. Blowing your nose is considered rude in some countries, yet belching after a meal may be a compliment.

## Brush Up on Your American History and Current Events

As an American traveling abroad, you will become a representative of your country whether you want to or not. Moreover, you'll find that most foreigners expect you to have an extensive knowledge of the United States—its history, politics, religion and geography—much in the same way that you would expect them to know about theirs. Often, you may meet people in your destination country who know more about the United States—though not all of it factual—than you know about their country. If you find yourself to be the lone American in a class, you may find your local professor asking you in-depth questions and assuming you can explain things to the class.

### QUICK TIP



***Just because something happened “before you were born” does not give you an excuse not to know about it!***

The more you know about the United States, therefore, the better you will be able to fare in such discussions, especially when it comes to rebutting misconceptions. Whatever the topic, however, do your best to discuss it intelligently and without giving offense.

It's particularly important, however, to understand both the historic relationship and current ties between the U.S. and your host country. This is especially true if there is any lingering discord, because eventually these topics will come up. Ignorance on your part may be a legitimate excuse, but it will not reflect well upon you, and it will put you on the defensive.

## FROM AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION LEADER

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*Learn as much as possible about your own family narrative. This knowledge will serve you well as you contemplate how to interpret your study abroad experience.*

— Nicholas Bassey, placement manager, Peace Corps; former director, Institute for International Public Policy Fellowship Program.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Everyone kept talking about having May 1st off of school for this big national holiday, so I finally asked a friend what exactly was being celebrated while we were out for coffee. She explained to me that a man named William Walker did a lot of damage in Nicaragua and attempted to move farther down to conquer Costa Rica, but that a peasant farmer from the province of Alajuela had fought him off with a ragtag army. I got confused and told her that William Walker sounded like an American name, to which she responded with the Spanish equivalent of, “well, yeah ... he was from your country.” I had no idea—how embarrassing!*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

*I was asked a lot about politics everywhere I went. From Costa Rica to Austria, I felt as though I could barely keep up with all the knowledge people had about American politics. Being in Europe at the height of the 2012 pre-election excitement really forced me to stay up to date on the news, since my coworkers were bound to ask me to elaborate on this or that candidate’s stance on a topic.*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica. Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.

*I hadn’t anticipated that I could learn so much about my own country while I was abroad.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year in Argentina. Studied abroad in Spain.



## Keep a Journal and/or Start a Blog

Regardless of whether you keep a journal in the United States, you should keep one while abroad. You will experience so many feelings; have so many new experiences; make so many observations; realize so many things about life, yourself and other cultures; and create so many memories. You may think you'll be able to remember them, but if you're like the rest of us, they will fade with time. Plus, you will have so many experiences, you'll want to write them down to relive them. When you write things down, as opposed to taking pictures (which you should also do), you remember different aspects of the same thing. The same goes for sounds.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*Keeping a journal was the only way to remember all the aspects of my time abroad. Every single detail seemed really special! Sometimes it felt like an escape; when I was frustrated, I would relax my mind by scribbling in my journal in my native language with the reassurance that the people around me would never get their hands on it, and could not understand my thoughts. It helped me clear my head. Keeping a journal also felt more personal than keeping a blog. Blogs, photo sharing, and social media are great for keeping your friends and family up to date on how you're doing, but keeping a journal was a safe way to remember all the ups and downs.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year in Argentina. Studied abroad in Spain.

*I kept a journal and it was such a great idea. You have lots of memories that will start fading away once you return back home and get back into your normal routine. Keeping a journal is a great way to trigger a memory of any one or all of the ups and downs associated with being abroad and to remind yourself of the experiences you had and what you were thinking in those moments.*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.

What should you write about? Write about what you're thinking at certain times. Describe your first days or week on the ground by detailing the sounds you hear walking to class, the people you encounter on the bus, and the first conversations you have with classmates. Take particular note of all the "firsts" you have and the

neat things you discover. Detail your aspirations and inspirations along the way. Be as descriptive as possible. Write about what you're expecting prior to an event, and then write down what actually happens. Write about your encounters with others and the exchange of culture through food, music, art and conversation.

In addition to journaling and taking lots of pictures, consider setting up a blog. Many students have done so to share their experiences with their inner circle of family and friends, as well as other students, and blogs can be a wonderful record of your experiences. But do be careful about what you post online. In addition to the usual caveats about posting personal or confidential information, remember that you are living in a different country and the laws of the host country apply to your behavior as well as sometimes your speech.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I started my blog, Mis(s)adventures, to chronicle my experiences and stories of life abroad for my friends and family. Anyone who knows me well will testify that Mis(s)adventures is a fitting title, as I've been known to board the wrong plane and land myself in the Russian E.R. But other than entertaining my friends and scaring my parents, keeping this blog turned out to be a great way to take a time-out from the fast-paced, Russian-speaking environment to reflect on what I was learning. I would highly recommend that anyone studying abroad keep a blog; even if you only post once a month, you will find it helpful in processing the crazy cross-cultural experience you are going through.*

— Hope Johnson, Gordon College. Studied abroad in Russia.

*I began writing The Study Abroad Blog a few weeks before I left for St. Andrews in the summer of 2009. It didn't take long before I realized that it would be a great resource for other students who were also studying abroad or who would be in the future. Travel, see new places, meet people from all over the world, experience new cultures, and yes, take some classes and learn stuff—studying abroad is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I want to help other students make the most of it.*

— Nate Nault, College of the Holy Cross. Studied abroad in Scotland.  
Spending postgraduate gap year in China.

## Pack Wisely

You've purchased your ticket, read up on everything from culture to climate, and have begun saying your "hasta luego." Now it's time to start packing! Our best advice and that of hundreds of students who have studied abroad before you is to "pack light," primarily because you will inevitably be bringing home more than you take. Although we've provided a list below, compiled from input from students, study abroad advisers, and fellow travelers, we recognize that packing is a personal thing. In addition to reviewing the list below, it's recommended that you consult with others who have studied abroad, especially those who have gone to your host country or even on your specific program, your parents or siblings who've traveled with you before, and the many student websites and blogs with detailed recommendations on what to bring. The list of items necessary to pack can change because of the increasing availability of international goods in most countries. In deciding what to include, be sure to identify which items can be secured easily in your host country and which ones can't.

### SOME GENERAL PACKING TIPS:

- **Make a checklist to be sure you don't forget anything, but be prepared to edit it down.**
- **Pack only what you can carry (one medium suitcase with wheels, one large backpack, one daypack/carry-on).**
- **Don't pack valuables in your checked luggage.**
- **Attach sturdy ID tags to your luggage, plus a colorful ribbon or tie for easy identification.**
- **Check your airline's baggage limitations.**

**PACK YOUR CARRY-ON WITH:**

- Two days' worth of clothes/personal items in case your checked bags are lost, plus:
- Passport, visa and plane ticket
- Cash (a few hundred dollars, or at least enough to exchange at or outside the airport, to get you out of the airport and to your destination)
- ATM and credit/debit cards (at least two of each)
- Health insurance card
- Student ID (home institution or international card)
- Copies of your documentation
- Contact information, including phone numbers, emails and physical addresses, for the following:
  - Your destination (including maps)
  - Your host institution (if different from above)
  - Your home institution and adviser
  - Your doctors at home
  - Local U.S. embassy and emergency numbers
  - Family and friends
- Medical information including a list of prescriptions, allergies and blood type
- Money belt, waist pack, or small purse to wear inside your clothes for cash and credit cards
- Electronics: Watch or clock, camera, laptop, mobile phone, iPod, chargers/adapters, USB flash drive
- Prescriptions for one month or longer, extra pair of contacts and eyeglasses
- Sunglasses
- Travel guide and a paperback book to read and swap later
- Food to eat on the trip, but not any fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, cheeses, etc. that are not allowed to be brought into your host country (except what you will eat on the plane—good to have fresh fruits and veggies for that!).

**PACK YOUR CHECKED LUGGAGE WITH:**

- Seven days' worth of clothes you'll wear to school that
  - Complement each other in color and style to mix and match
  - Can be layered for cooler/colder days/nights
  - Can be hand washed, if necessary (not dry cleaned)
  - Don't wrinkle too much
- Include underwear and weather-appropriate socks
- Warm/cold clothes to anticipate weather/seasonal changes
- One dressier outfit (or more depending on your program requirements)
- One coat with hood (waterproof or wind resistant)
- Two pairs of pajamas
- Sturdy shoes plus a pair of sneakers/trainers
- Bathing suit, cover up and hat
- Flip-flops for the shower or pool
- A medium-sized towel and a small washcloth
- Travel umbrella
- Small supply of general toiletries (plan to buy more on the ground) plus brush/comb and hair supplies
- Specific toiletries you do not want to be without (tampons, condoms, specific razors, deodorant)
- First-aid kit including tweezers and nail kit
- Pocket knife with bottle opener, can opener, corkscrew
- Travel alarm clock
- Journal (if you have room, pack it in your carry-on)
- Necessary school supplies (at least one notebook, a few pencils/ pens)
- Small inexpensive gifts (playing cards, music, postcards from home, candy)
- This book: *A Student Guide to Studying Abroad*
- You may also want to bring some food items for comfort, for example, a jar of peanut butter, a special jam, or certain cookies you like. But if you do, bring only sealed items and be sure to check which types of food items are allowed into the country.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I found that it was better to pack too little rather than too much. I only brought one large suitcase and it turned out to be more than enough. Over the course of four months, I accumulated a lot of souvenirs and things, and I was happy to have the luggage space to take things back home at minimal additional expense.*

— Isabelle Feldhaus, University of Southern California. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in South Africa.

Packing can be a daunting and difficult task, but remember—it's just stuff. If you start making a list and give yourself plenty of time to pack and repack, you'll be more likely to end up taking the most important things. And remember, what's more important than the stuff in your bags is the stuff in your head, that is to say, all the research you've done and all the important things you've learned leading up to your departure.

**USING MOBILE PHONES ABROAD**

Mobile phones are common all over the world, and having one makes sense for emergencies and confirming local plans. Explore all options to determine which phone will work best for you based on the amount of time you will be abroad, the location where you will be studying, and the amount of money you are willing to spend. If you have a U.S. phone, most mobile providers offer supplemental services and plans so you can use your phone abroad. But it can be quite expensive and may not work because some mobile phones are not compatible for use on networks outside the United States. Another option is to buy a local SIM card to use in your U.S. phone (this will only work if you have an unlocked tri-band or quad-band U.S. phone). Check that your phone is unlocked and compatible with overseas networks; otherwise it will not work abroad. Another option, probably the most popular and cost efficient for students staying a semester or more, is to buy a local cell phone (and SIM card) upon arrival. Former students and/or program providers can provide details on the best local stores and service plans.



# TOP TIPS

## Top 10 Tips to Prepare for Your Trip

1. *Complete your application in time.*
2. *Secure all necessary documentation.*
3. *Confirm your travel plans.*
4. *Take care of personal and financial business.*
5. *Take care of your health.*
6. *Think globally.*
7. *Become familiar with your new country before you leave.*
8. *Brush up on your American history and current events.*
9. *Plan to keep a journal and/or set up a blog.*
10. *Pack wisely.*





CHAPTER 6

## Immersing Yourself in the Culture

Learning to live in another country involves a lot more than simply learning how to get to class, making yourself understood in the local language, and getting used to different foods. Not only must you learn a whole new range of skills, you must also relearn how to do a lot of “old” things that have become second nature. Accomplishing both involves making subtle but important changes in your expectations of yourself and others. More importantly, you have to cope with a loss of identity and familiarity and get along without some of the personal perks in your life that provide encouragement, direction and meaning for you at home.

The cultural benefits of studying abroad are obvious. Spending time in a foreign country can’t help but open your eyes to the wider world, especially different ways of doing the everyday things that are common across all cultures. As noted earlier in Chapter 1, you’ll have a much more expansive definition of “different.” You will learn about stereotypes and how there are grains of truth in some, but also that so many are off base and harmful. You’ll probably laugh at others’ perceptions of Americans and feel compelled to communicate “the truth” about your own culture. As a result, you will probably become both more reflective about your own culture and what that culture has instilled in you, and increasingly appreciative of what other cultures have to offer. And, paradoxically, you’ll also learn that people around the world are more alike than different. This openness to different approaches should make you a better problem-solver and team player. It should also help you begin to develop the cross-cultural competency employers are looking for in global workers today.

This chapter focuses on the importance of immersing yourself in the culture, which is best done if you properly prepare for the adventure. This includes understanding the idea of “culture” and learning how to cope with cultural differences. In an effort to address others’ misconceptions of Americans, you may find yourself serving as a sort of “cultural ambassador” explaining the extensive diversity of the United States. To be sure, your new experiences will be a constant source of stimulation, and we encourage you to revel in them. But we also remind you to remain alert: you are now in a foreign environment and you will encounter many differences, both obvious and subtle.

## Take Your Cross-Cultural Preparation Seriously

Cross cultural differences can and often do interfere with communication and interpersonal relationships. As you settle into life in another country, you must figure out how to take the local bus, order unfamiliar foods from possibly incomprehensible menus, or conduct fieldwork or research working with a diverse group of people under the guidance of a native professor. You must learn how to do common things differently than you have done them your whole life—in a new culture interacting with people who view the world differently than you. You will be interacting with people who not only don’t share your common cultural framework, but who, many times, have misconceptions about American culture, which may be displaced onto you. If you haven’t lived in another country before, and haven’t been briefed on what to anticipate and prepared on how to deal with it, you may have a very difficult time adjusting. Cross-cultural training can make a very big difference in the success of a student’s time on the ground.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*In order to prepare for my year abroad, I went on a five-week trip to Spain over the summer with my classmates. We took numerous courses in Spanish and one titled, “Living and Working Abroad,” where professors and former students shared their experiences with us. There is also a forum on NEU’s website between current and former students where you can post questions and receive timely responses.*

— Daniel Schlemovitz, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in Spain.

Evidence collected over several decades illustrates that most people would benefit from some sort of preparation and training before crossing cultures. Quick exposure to introductory information sessions alone may not be enough to prepare students for the radically different environment they will encounter overseas. Failure to prepare properly can prevent students from getting the most out of their investment.

If one of the benefits of studying abroad is to acquire cross-cultural competency skills, it's necessary to first understand the differences in order to then successfully communicate and collaborate across cultural boundaries. Cultures entail differences in perspectives. Culture constitutes the cornerstone of our identities—who we think we are, the ways we make meaning, what is important to us and why. Culture is also a key source of conflict between people.

Good training programs can help students better adapt to new environments by accelerating this process and giving you a specific framework for:

- Understanding differences between/among cultures.
- Learning cross-cultural communications dos and don'ts.
- Developing skills to adapt to new environments.
- Working within diverse teams.
- Providing an overview of the cultural, historical, political and economic fundamentals of the host country.

Of course one size does *not* fit all, and training can never cover every situation. But good preparation helps develop problem-solving techniques that can help you excel academically and live and work cross-culturally. It also gives you and your fellow students abroad a common language and theoretical framework for discussing the thousand practical ways cultural difference will impact you during your stay. This may help ease understanding and adjustment. In turn, you will enhance your career prospects and personal development.

## Request Cross-Cultural Training

Studying abroad—although glamorous, exciting, and usually lots of fun—is also serious business. Living in a foreign environment is a challenge for most people, and students are no exception, however flexible and open-minded they may be. Eventually, the glamour can wear off, and the more you learn, the more you realize you don't know. Although colleges and study abroad program coordinators try to prepare students by providing orientations, websites to visit, and country-specific information to review, most students are still not adequately prepared for the cross-cultural experience.

In our survey of students who have recently studied abroad students indicated they were somewhat or adequately prepared by predeparture training in the following areas:

- **Country-specific information: 74%**
- **Clear guidelines and policies to follow: 73%**
- **Specific information related to class schedule and content: 61%**
- **Orientations (defined as a two- to three-hour presentation that includes academic and personal specifics needed for your experience, with access to people who have been there): 63%**
- **Required attendance at on-campus group presentations: 55%**
- **Name, number and email for in-country contacts: 53%**
- **List of websites to look at: 48%**

But when it came to understanding culture—what it is and how it works—in order to adjust and become comfortable, the vast majority of students were not properly prepared. Again from the same survey:

- **Cross-cultural training: 25%**
- **Introductions to students who had previously gone to the host country: 40%**
- **One-on-one guidance counselor prior to leaving: 26%**
- **List of books to read: 22%**

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Before leaving, I received an orientation through my school's study abroad office. It covered the specifics of the program and logistical considerations, as well as some preparation for living in another cultural setting. It introduced me to the different levels of culture shock and homesickness that I might experience and how to best deal with it while abroad. It also provided a general history and cultural background of South Africa and encouraged students to pursue further research.*

— Isabelle Feldhaus, University of Southern California. Studied abroad as a Gilman scholar in South Africa.

Only one-quarter of our survey respondents said they were provided with cross-cultural training before they left, and a little more than one-third were offered the names of fellow students who'd gone to the same host country. Arguably, these are the two best ways to help students prepare themselves for their specific and new environment. Moreover, culture shock books or even travel guides that can provide helpful information on cultural specifics by country or region weren't often recommended. Culture cannot be adequately addressed in a mass orientation where the subject is presented as a broad concept only; specific examples by culture and country must be provided to bring the concepts to life.

These results are troubling. Students are relying on the professionals advising them to make sure they have access to all they need to have a safe and successful time abroad. In fact, research conducted over the past 10 years and discussed in the landmark 2012 book, *Student Learning Abroad: What Our Students are Learning, What They're Not, and What We Can Do About It*, shows that far too many undergraduates are not learning and developing abroad in ways that were common as recently as a decade ago. One of the biggest shortfalls is the lack of intervention prior to, during and after study abroad, which is just as critical to students' intercultural learning as the study abroad experience itself. Professionals in the study abroad community would be well advised to do further research into the findings so that they will be able to make informed decisions in designing and delivering programs, as well as in advising students about their options.

In an effort to determine why this type of specific preparedness or training wasn't happening, we followed up with several study abroad offices, as well as students.

We learned that cost is a big issue. Study abroad programs are already expensive and to add specific training by experts (cross-cultural training must be provided by experts, not by a study abroad adviser with a *Culture Shock!* book), seemed cost-prohibitive. Time is another factor; both the limited time a student has prior to leaving combined with the overstretched departments advising students going abroad. Moreover, many study abroad advisers didn't think more was necessary beyond the general orientations they were already giving. But when we followed up with students, most of whom had spent at least one semester abroad, we found that almost all wished they had been more prepared to deal with cultural differences on the ground. We believe this is an important area to focus on moving forward, and recommend that colleges implement cross-cultural training programs or simulations that are both cost-effective and productive for the students—and that students request it.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I did not receive special training for my study abroad experience. There are two things that I think would have helped me to better prepare for my study abroad experience. First, I think that interacting with a group of U.S. students that lived in that country or locals of the host country living in the U.S. would have been exceptional. Even though some information about customs and traditions in other countries could be found in the Internet, it does not substitute for one-to-one interactions with someone who knows the country and can address specific concerns we might have. Second, having a contact in the host country could have helped me transition into the new culture and decrease the expected anxiety that is experienced when confronted with novelty. I should mention that my Study Abroad Program (Olé-RUM) did have group presentations, but they were focused on the overall benefits of studying abroad and not specifically on the cross-cultural experience.*

— Amarylis Velez-Perez, University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Spain.

The rationale is strong and the reasons are clear: When you go abroad, you not only land in a different country, you enter another culture. You can't see it, but you can feel it. Culture has to do with values, behaviors, beliefs and attitudes shared and shaped by an environment. It's expressed in feelings, judgments and mental

constructs that are typically subtle in nature. If you don't know to be aware of culture, you won't be able to respond appropriately, perhaps inhibiting your ability to communicate. What could be worse, you may be in a culture in which people do not tell you directly about your lack of awareness, so the cycle of cultural ineptitude escalates.

### **WHAT'S UP WITH CULTURE?**

Excellent cross-cultural training programs exist, such as “What's Up with Culture?” developed by primary author and editor Dr. Bruce La Brack, Professor Emeritus, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific. He and his team spent three years developing the online program, now a national model in the field, which was funded by federal dollars and thus offered free online for anyone to use. It offers a wealth of information on the concept of culture and how it impacts one's ability to understand and function in a new and unfamiliar environment. It focuses on the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that all study abroad students, regardless of their specific destination, will find useful.

For best results, start at the beginning and work through it before you go abroad. There are many self-assessment and activity exercises from which you can learn a great deal about your communication style, your cultural values, and your attitudes toward and reactions to different ways of doing things. Keep in mind, though, that although “What's Up with Culture” offers a self-guided and self-paced program, it is not a stand-alone distance-learning course. Neither is it a substitute for an orientation or reentry program offered by your university or study abroad program. As noted in Chapter 5, take advantage of all study abroad meetings or program orientation briefings, and pay special attention to those offering country- or culture-specific information.

## FROM AN EDUCATOR

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*Study abroad involves two critical decisions. The first is to commit to going overseas. The second is even more important: how seriously are you going to prepare for your intercultural adventure? You can simply assume that you already know enough that the experience will be easy...ignoring the potential impact of trying to operate in an unfamiliar cultural environment, which will almost certainly ensure adjustment problems that will make your interactions unsatisfactory for both you and those around you. Or you can make an effort to understand what kinds of cultural issues are likely to arise, and figure out beforehand how to respond appropriately. The choice is yours to make.*

— Bruce LaBrack, professor emeritus, School of International Studies,  
University of the Pacific.

## Cross-Cultural Training Programs

Colleges serious about expanding the role of study abroad as an integral part of the education process (as so many say they are) would be well advised to follow the lead of the University of the Pacific, which offers the oldest continuous, conceptually linked, credit-bearing course of its type in the United States. The objective of the course is twofold: To enable students to adapt to their new cultural environment “relatively painlessly” in the short term, and to help them understand the cultural transition process at a higher level so they can use their study abroad experience to generate cultural transition and adaptation skills over the long term (for more on these skills, check out Chapter 8). In other words, a student may study abroad in Spain now, but the goal is to enable them to move comfortably to any other country later. This distinction is an important one.

All students who study abroad are required to take Cross Cultural I before going abroad, which is based on a curriculum of general cultural information and includes a culture-specific research paper on their country. Topics covered are:

- **What is culture?** Cultures are much more than food, sports and art. They are a system of shared values, beliefs and attitudes that are learned by a group of people who primarily work and socialize together. Students learn that cultures are complex, functional wholes, and deviations from what they are used to are not abnormal, just different.



- **How do we learn culture, and how does it affect our perception of things?** Students learn how to observe their own culture by stepping back and into the shoes of someone not from here, a Martian, and are challenged to view the common through a different perspective.
- **What are your own cultural norms?** In order to learn another culture, students must recognize and understand their own cultural values and norms. Focusing on U.S. cultural norms, while discussing diversity and the predominance of individualism, students discuss the many values and norms of U.S. culture.
- **What are the variations in communication styles that we typically encounter in global travel?** A range of communication style variables are discussed and demonstrated, such as the contrasts between direct and indirect communication, language differences, nonverbal communications. Students learn how people can misjudge each other quickly across cultural lines because of communication style.
- **How do people actually develop intercultural sensitivity?** Students are introduced to the theory of the “developmental model of intercultural sensitivity,” and they discuss the importance of the cycle of experience/reflection/experience/reflection.
- **What is it like to adjust to a new culture?** Students learn about various models of culture shock so that they know that their feelings are normal, but they must find ways to move on and deal with them.

In the second part of the course required for all international studies students, Cross Cultural II, students have returned from studying abroad with a lot of experience. They no longer need to be convinced that culture exists and that they are likely to encounter cultural differences when abroad. Cross Cultural II is designed to deepen students' inquiry into the cultural learning process while using their own and others' experiences as evidence to consider, challenge and test various theories of culture learning. In addition, diversity of cultures is discussed, as are power structures within cultures.

In Chapter 1 we emphasized the importance of cross-cultural competency as one of the most important skills that students studying abroad can acquire, both for personal growth and for future career prospects. So ask your adviser early on if your

program offers cross-cultural training and ask fellow students who've gone before you if the course helped, and do they have specific advice for you with respect to culture. If your program doesn't offer formal cross-cultural training for your host country, you *must* take responsibility for self-preparation.

#### FROM AN EDUCATOR

*The principle goal of the course is to lead students through reflection on their experiences abroad and their own intellectual and cultural development through the experience. It is far too easy for students to “shoebox” their experience—come home, get on with their lives, stick their souvenirs in a shoebox, and otherwise not let the experience really become a part of their identity. We consider study abroad an integral part of international studies students' education, and we expect them to develop skills, attitudes and the capacity to engage in culturally appropriate behaviors in cross-cultural and intercultural situations.*

— Susan Sample, associate professor, School of International Studies,  
University of the Pacific.

## Seek Out Information from Others

In addition to cross-cultural training, people who have previously studied abroad in your host country or who have other experience there will be an invaluable source of information on what to expect when you get there. Remember: the more you know before you go, the less you'll have to learn after you arrive. Here are a few tips:

- Read about the everyday behaviors and practices of the people of the place you're going to well before you leave. And read about them from several different sources so as to both reinforce the information and better ensure that you aren't missing anything—or getting biased opinions from one or two observers who may have axes to grind.
- Talk to people who either grew up in or spent considerable time in the country where you're going. Ask them specifically what differences in social behavior you should know about.

- Seek out people like you and ask about stereotypes they encountered while studying abroad and how they dealt with them.
- Read evaluations written by students who have studied abroad in your host country before. If you have questions, try to email them to follow up.

If you have any concerns about race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability accessibility in your host country, seek out clear and credible information about local realities and available resources before you go. Read on for some specific information on a few groups below. Information on being a woman abroad can be found in Chapter 7, along with safety tips.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I did not receive specialized training before leaving for my study abroad trip. I did, however, talk to a number of students who studied abroad. I also went to my college's study abroad office and read evaluations written by various students about their experiences. This was incredibly helpful because I was able to communicate with students who recently returned from a journey that I was about to begin, rather than an educational administrator going through a rote list of general dos and don'ts.*

— Leah Goodridge, Vassar College. Studied abroad in England.

*I was really nervous about telling my host dad I was gay even though on the application I clearly stated that I wanted someone who was open. One night I was eating dinner with him, and he was pressing very hard to find out about my love life. I nervously confronted what seemed like his interrogation with my truth. I told him that I liked guys and that I am gay. My answer did not seem to faze him, he just continued to ask questions. I'd recommend that other students not wait until a month or more into the program until they tell their host family about their sexual orientation. If you do so you are hiding a good part of your life from them and in doing so limiting the relationship you can have with them.*

— Benjamin, Elon University. Studied abroad in Argentina.

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**FROM AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION LEADER**

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*For any person of color or anyone from a diverse background, find someone like you with whom you can have a conversation about the host countries you're considering. You can learn the subtle nuances and gain valuable context from others who've spent time there before. That said, their experience may not be your experience. Add their perspective as a tool in your study abroad toolbox.*

— Nicholas Bassey, placement manager, Peace Corps; former director, Institute for International Public Policy Fellowship Program.

## **LGBT Travelers**

Attitudes and tolerance toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons vary from country to country, just as they vary in different parts of the United States. Moreover, a number of countries provide legal protections to those who are LGBT. But others don't. Consensual same-sex sexual activity remains illegal in about 70 countries in the world. Penalties in these countries vary from a minimum penalty to long-term imprisonment or even the death sentence. The annual Human Rights Report that the State Department publishes also includes a section specifically regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in each country.

Before choosing an international destination, therefore, LGBT travelers should carefully research the laws and biases there and consider how open they can be. Take time to learn about the following in your host country:

- General attitudes toward LGBT persons
- Local laws
- Norms/styles/customs in your host culture
- LGBT organizations and support resources
- LGBT media
- Meeting places

Additional sources of information include: NAFSA Rainbow SIG; International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA); and the U.S. State Department site for LGBT travelers.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*When selecting a program I would advise students to choose one that is open to the LGBTQIA community, however, I realize this is a challenge because sometimes the regions we are interested in are not that welcoming. Taking my case as an example, I knew I wanted to study abroad in South America. Although I took into account how welcoming each country was of their LGBTQIA community, it was not the only factor that went into my decision. I think that the student should create a priority list of what is most important to them to get out of that experience. I will say that I wanted to choose the country in South America that was the most gay friendly, and as it so happens Argentina is way ahead of many countries when it comes to LGBTQIA rights. I think it is important to consider your interest and your concentration, while also being aware of the social implications of each program.*

— Benjamin, Elon University. Studied abroad in Argentina.

## Persons with Disabilities

Disabled or not, all international travelers have experienced the awkwardness of being different or standing out in a new country. Like trying new customs or meeting new people, it's just a normal part of traveling. Persons with disabilities will experience a different sort of awkwardness or discomfort. For example, they may encounter unpleasant or demeaning cultural attitudes directed against them specifically because of their disability. It might be difficult to explain a disability, especially a nonapparent disability, in the language or cultural context of the host country. Moreover, the explanation may not receive the kind of response expected. Nor will those in the program necessarily be capable of appreciating the experience. Connecting with other foreigners with disabilities, or local people with disabilities, can often be instrumental in helping to process feelings, identify positive coping strategies, or gain new understanding of the other point of view.

In addition, you can turn this acceptance of difference into personal growth, depending on your willingness and ability to come to terms with foreign cultural ideas and practices. And you'll also most likely meet people who are understanding and welcoming. By your very presence and by your active participation in your exchange program or profession, you may well be challenging perceptions.

This and other advice on dealing with cultural encounters as a person with a disability abroad can be found at website of the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE). The NCDE provides free online resources and stories, and information and referral services, for exchange participants with disabilities. It is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and administered by Mobility International USA. For more information check out *Survival Strategies for Going Abroad: A Guide for People with Disabilities*, by Laura Hershey, published by Mobility International USA, A World Awaits You (AWAY), and the MIUSA blog.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Something that I encountered, which any traveler with a perceptible disability may also face, is discrimination. I experienced teachers who refused to allow me into their classrooms, despite the orders of progressive administrators. I encountered people who were very frightened that my disability might be contagious in various parts of the world. In many places, shopkeepers refused to allow me to look at behind-the-counter items more closely. Those are just a few examples. There is little an individual traveler can do to respond to overt prejudice .... I find it helpful to rate the responses, which helps me keep my perspective and my cool ... I can inform them of the grade they get and sometimes that is enough to bring them around.*

— Arie Farnam, who is blind, Lawrence University. Studied abroad in Germany, Russia, Czech Republic, Zimbabwe.

## Prepare for Stereotypes

What exactly does an American look like? The United States is home to people from such a vast array of racial and ethnic backgrounds, it's impossible to say. In most large cities, for example, it's common to see people representing every region of the world and hear a multitude of languages being spoken. What do Americans think? What do they feel? How do they act? There's no one answer to those questions either. Not only are the individuals themselves inherently different, they are also influenced by geographic differences, socioeconomic conditions, education level, vocation, religion, and cultural heritage. Our diversity is one of our strengths, yet stereotypical perceptions of Americans persist.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Many people I encountered believed that Americans are all from Texas or California, and they had views of us based on stereotypes of these two states. Most of these I just kind of laughed at and moved on, but sometimes I just had to say, “we’re not all like that.”*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*Many Moroccans did not believe I was American because I was not overweight.*

— Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.

*The most frustrating aspect of “travelling while black” is being constantly bombarded by negative stereotypes of African-Americans. Unfortunately for many Mongolians and Chinese, the only time that they have seen or heard a black person is in movies, on television, and in music. On Martin Luther King Day, my 11th graders discussed racism, stereotypes and prejudice. I had each student write down stereotypes about African-Americans, Caucasians, Russians, Mongolians and Chinese. Underneath African-Americans the following was written: Crime, drugs, white teeth, athletic, ghetto/poor. Recently I had an educated, well-travelled Mongolian man tell me that he was also from the “ghetto.” Naturally, he assumed that is where I came from. Although instances like these make living abroad more difficult, they have also made my experience in Mongolia more enriching.*

— Marikaa Nixon, Spelman College. Studied abroad in China.

*I was asked some pretty difficult questions beyond current affairs that were quite eye opening as to how we are viewed in other nations. In Latin America I was asked if the United States has any poverty at all, or if we are all rich. In Germany some students of Turkish decent were afraid that I would hate them because they believed that all Americans hate all Muslims. I felt such a strong duty to show that we are more than the media and television portrays and that we are a diverse nation racially, religiously and politically.*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica. Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.

Stereotypes sometimes contain a grain of truth, but they prevent us from getting to know people. They can also be really unfair. You will be confronted with

stereotypes, and you'll be judged by those stereotypes—not by who you are. It's important that you understand what some of these stereotypes are. Do research on your host country and culture. Try to glean from others who have gone there before what differences they encountered and how they dealt with them. Start thinking about issues of race, wealth, poverty, gender, religion and politics here in the United States. At some point you will probably find yourself serving as a cultural ambassador, explaining for example that not all Americans are rich, not all Americans own a gun, and that what they see of Americans on television and in the movies may or may not be accurate, but is hardly typical. It will be challenging. And you may well find yourself answering questions about topics you personally haven't thought much about before. But the exchange of ideas, beliefs and cultural values will inevitably prove to be a rewarding experience for both parties. At the very least, you will be correcting other peoples' erroneous or stereotypical perceptions of America and American culture. For information on stereotypes related to American women, check out the section in Chapter 7.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Being a mixed-race American always brought on interesting and informative conversation while studying abroad. I found myself being a bit of a “cultural ambassador” and having the opportunity to explain some of the Jewish and Chinese cultural traditions. I was also a representative of the “melting pot” that the U.S. represents. It was very surprising to me to see some of the reactions I would receive while abroad: upon asking me where my mother was from, when I would say “Iowa,” people got so confused! It was great to be able to break down some of these stereotypes and provide some cultural education about the diversity within the U.S.*

— **Natasha F.C. Diamond, University of California at San Diego. Studied abroad as an undergraduate in Chile and Spain. Studied abroad as a graduate student, George Washington University, in Mexico.**

*Being a Guatemalan-American woman who blended in in Egypt because of my features had both positive and negative effects. At times, I was expected to follow certain Egyptian social norms because many thought I was Egyptian. Other times, my identity caused suspicion or excessive attention. Dealing with the way others view us because of preconceived notions or stereotypes enforced by the media can also be difficult. I ended up having to explain my*



*identity a lot against the idea of what an “American” looks or acts like. However, it gave me the perfect opportunity to represent the diversity that exists within the U.S. Explaining my dual culture, bilingual background, and the term “Latino” is quite an honor. Literally you are a cultural ambassador with a responsibility to help shape other persons’ perspectives of the U.S., your state, university, culture and religion, into a positive one.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

*My main issue in both Istanbul and smaller areas of the country was convincing people that I was American! I would use President Barack Obama as an example of another African-American like me, which led to the light bulb going on, proving that yes, indeed, there are definitely people in the U.S. that look like me! Most students I went to school with were pretty knowledgeable about the events in American history that African-Americans have had to overcome, specifically slavery, Jim Crow laws, and social justice inequalities that still exist today. I would gladly engage in discussion over these issues, and that is where I felt as if I was doing the most at my job of being a “cultural ambassador.”*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.

## Racial and Ethnic Concerns

No two students studying abroad have exactly the same experience, even when they are in the same program in the same country at the same time, and this is true for students of color and those from U.S. minority ethnic or racial backgrounds. While overseas, you may find yourself part of an ethnic minority or majority for the first time in your life. For instance, if you’re visiting a country where you have ethnic or racial roots—an American with Chinese roots studying in Shanghai, a Puerto Rican studying in Spain, or an African-American studying in Ghana—you may have to consider the local norms and expectations in ways that other students with different backgrounds may not. You may inadvertently be identified with one group or another simply based on your appearance. Know what you are getting into and prepare yourself for it. Try to find others on your campus who have studied abroad and who can tell you what to expect and how best to deal with it.

Check out the Diversity Abroad and AllAbroad.us websites for specific information for African-Americans, Asian/Pacific Islander Americans, Hispanic/Latin Americans and Native Americans.

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*I did not encounter any obvious issues related to my race, although I was keenly aware of the role race still plays in South African society. In fact, it was a major part of my research. Although race relations left an ugly stain on the country during the Apartheid era, much progress has been made to date. However, there are still many instances of poverty, crime, violence, and other social injustice—not to mention mistrust—that stem directly from racism in the country. Unlike here in the U.S., people viewed me first as an American and associated me with that culture, rather than making snap judgments based on the color of my skin. Such is not the case in the U.S., where much of our initial perceptions of people are solely based on race.*

— Darigg C. Brown, Pennsylvania State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in South Africa.

*I had an encounter that really brightened my day and made me laugh. I was sharing a cab with a group of Peace Corps volunteers. I was the only minority in the group. The conversation went as follows.*

*Driver: Where are you from*

*Me: America*

*Driver: Oooo ok.....India?*

*Me: No, America.*

*Driver: (Shakes head) Filipino?*

*Me: No, America like everyone else here in the car.*

*Driver: African?*

*Me: Sir I am from America!!!*

*Driver: (He has a complete moment of clarity) Oooooo I know! Barack Obama daughter!!!*

*Me: Yes, sir. You are right. #theObamaeffect*

— Marikaa Nixon, Spelman College. Studied abroad in China.

## Get Off to a Great Start

Regardless of how extensively you have researched your new host country or how thorough your orientation sessions have been, it's a completely different ball game once you've actually arrived. And nothing will be more important to getting off to a good start than approaching your new surroundings with your eyes and ears wide open. Notice things big and small, and expect to be overwhelmed by the excitement and novelty of it all. This is, after all, an experience that you have been looking forward to for months if not years. But avoid the temptation to make quick judgments, especially up or down comparisons with the way things are done back in the United States. Those assessments can only be fairly made after months of comprehensive experience. The first order of business for you is to familiarize yourself with your immediate surroundings and start your study abroad experience off on the right foot. To that end, we've compiled a list of productive "to dos" for your first few days.

### QUICK TIP



***Be forthright, open and good-natured about a gaffe, whether it's yours or someone else's.***

## When You Arrive

- Call or email home (you should do this as soon as you've arrived at your new lodgings).
- Set up your room/apartment; do this thoughtfully, taking time to make it feel as home-like and comfortable as you can reasonably make it—it *will* be your home for the time you are there.
- Get to know your roommates and/or host family; make time for conversations, walks and meals together—this will start to set the patterns of your interactions with them, which may well persist for the length of your stay.

- Get your bearings by walking around the neighborhood.
- Learn how to place an emergency phone call (look up your local emergency number: [http://studentsabroad.state.gov/content/pdfs/911\\_ABROAD.pdf](http://studentsabroad.state.gov/content/pdfs/911_ABROAD.pdf)).
- Search out local food stores, banks/ATMs, pharmacies, laundry facilities, post offices, internet cafés, and other shops offering items and services you might need, and/or “local hangouts” that may become part of your new home.
- Change money; open a bank account, if appropriate.
- Buy a local cell phone, SIM card, or phone cards.
- Make your way from your new “home” to campus and walk around there. Be sure to stop by the international student office to introduce yourself and request a campus tour.
- Familiarize yourself with local modes of transportation; ask your roommates or host family for the safest and best routes to travel.
- Be a tourist. Visit a major museum, take a city tour, grab a newspaper or book and sit in a park or coffee/tea shop and watch the world go by.
- Make your first journal entry.

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#### FROM A STUDENT

*Make sure that you have all of your proper travel documents and keep them safe. Get acquainted with the area ... do light traveling at first.*

— Ashley Gaona, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

*The very first thing I did when I got to Rome was make sure I knew how to get to my school and back home, both walking and using the train.*

— Carolyn Siska, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Italy.

*Making Parisian friends early on in the semester both in class and through university-sponsored events opened so many doors for me and the people who I was with. It allowed us to really get to know the city from a student's point of view as opposed to learning from a guidebook.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I'm a reader. I love the smell of a new book. The feel of ink on a page is one of my favorites. Few things make me happier than sitting down for an afternoon with a book and a warm cup of tea. When I got to Beijing, I set to the streets with a goal in mind—find somewhere in this new place that I could read. It was a way to explore the city, find the places I wouldn't have found otherwise (like the fruit stand tucked down an alley, or a Chinese pancake food cart). But best of all, it left me with someplace I knew whenever things began to get too new or too unfamiliar during my first months.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

## Embrace Your New Home

Almost everyone will tell you that you need to “hit the ground running” by interacting as quickly as possible with a wide range of local people. We agree. The first few weeks are a great time to use your newness to your advantage, especially by making as many local friends and acquaintances as possible. Unless they are completely inured to foreigners, they will be more than happy to show you a favorite restaurant, go with you as you try new foods, and show you the ins and outs of the neighborhood. They'll open doors that you didn't know existed, and, by doing so, offer you an insider's perspective of their country. First introductions are priceless and often not able to be repeated after you've been on the ground for a few weeks or months. By all means, let your new friends show off their city or culture—and many times their English language skills. You will find that if you demonstrate a genuine interest in and respect for their culture, most people are more than happy to explain various aspects of it to you, even the seemingly odd or really strange stuff. This will reduce the stress of having to figure everything out for yourself. If you focus on building relationships with most everyone you encounter, you will begin to make friends and integrate.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the more big new things you experience, the more you will also need to find comfort in small, familiar things. You'll breathe a sigh of relief when you return to your room set up with “your stuff” and are able to find friends—especially fellow Americans—with whom you don't have to be constantly

on your guard for fear of saying or doing something culturally incorrect. We'd recommend, however, that you let these moments be the exception and not the norm. After all, it is only by getting outside your cultural comfort zone that you will be able to learn and grow.

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*I studied in Rome for four months. I was so homesick when I first got there, arriving in August and during an extremely hot summer. I had no idea, however, that in Italy they don't believe in air conditioning. To make it worse, we lived on a pretty busy street right near a stoplight where people liked to rev their engines in the middle of the night, and where the train always stopped. It was hard to keep the windows open for air because it was so loud, but I wasn't sleeping well. I was ready to go home. I would cry over Skype every night, but my parents knew that if I stayed it would be a great experience for me. My mom told me a couple weeks after being there that if I stayed until the end of September and I was still homesick, then I could come home. I ended up traveling through that whole month and come September, I laughed off the idea of going home and stuck it out. I can't tell you how happy I was that my parents didn't let me come home.*

— Carolyn Siska, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Italy.

*The first week or two is a great time to use your innocence to your advantage and make friends with people eager to meet a foreign student. It can also help ease anxiety and open doors for you. One example I recall was when I ventured to a local library one afternoon. After reading an atlas for about an hour in the only available seat in the reading area, the library announced it was closing. Upon departure the man I had been sitting next to asked me what I studied in school. After chatting for several minutes we exchanged phone numbers. We soon became friends and he even let me accompany him to visit a local UNESCO World Heritage site (Spanish citizens could take a guest free of charge). Whether at the library, running along the river, socializing at a botellón (essentially a mob of hundreds or thousands of students enjoying wine and rum together) or asking for directions, I found that nearly every risk I took in conversing with someone while abroad resulted in something positive.*

— Peter D. A. Wood, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Spain.

## FROM A STUDENT

*The easiest way to meet friends and immerse myself in the Moroccan culture and way of life was to live my life like a Moroccan. I think it was relatively easy to do since I was a guy. I would wake up in the morning and pick up the latest edition of the “Alakhbar Alyom” newspaper before sitting down for a coffee at Alatlal coffee shop. There, I would generally find other Moroccan guys sitting down and having their coffee and getting ready for the day, too. It was natural to start a conversation about what I was reading in the newspaper.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

Sometimes things just seem really strange. And to you, they are, because they're new. That's okay. If you haven't traveled much outside the United States, you may not realize how different even the littlest things can be. To be sure, no one source can prepare you for all that awaits you. As noted earlier in this chapter, it's best if you do your own research, talk to people who've either grown up or gone to your host country before, and request cross-cultural training. But to help you clear some of the bigger hurdles, we've offered up a few of the more prevalent differences below.

## Classes

University life is different in other countries. Although some countries have large campuses like we do in the United States, more often than not, they are spread out across a city in small little clusters. In addition, in many countries, students tend to be older and live at home since the concept of “going away to college” is not nearly as prevalent as it is in the United States. Moreover, higher education is generally viewed as an earned privilege, not the expected path after high school. In many countries, especially in the developing world, a much smaller percentage of the total population goes to college than in the United States. For instance, in many Asian countries no more than 15 to 20 percent of the top students go to college, whereas more than 50 percent of the U.S. adult population has attended some college. As a result, college students abroad are often assumed to be more mature and independent learners than may be the case in the United States. The burden will be on you to prove that you are “up to” thriving in that relatively autonomous

environment. As one example, there may be less feedback on your progress than you are used to. In many countries, grades are based solely on a single midterm and/or a final exam or project, and are not typically explained or contested. Nor are professors typically anywhere near as friendly or sociable with students as they tend to be in the United States. The relationship between the two is often much more like that of an employer and his or her employees.

These differences can be nerve-wracking in and of themselves. But there are others, especially in structure and organization. American campuses, for example, have a clear registration process, a defined syllabus, regular meeting places for classes, and a clearly defined grading system. Abroad, you may find your class meeting outside at alternative locations, such as a park or a museum, or meeting at different times, with the professors frequently late. You may have no idea how you'll be graded at the end of the term. For these reasons, many students choose to take classes pass/fail to minimize the stress. But you need to check with your advisers to find out whether you can do this and still receive credit (see Chapter 2).

Although these differences may frustrate you—especially at first—it's not going to do you any good to get mad or rail against the system. It's far better to just accept them, and see what you can learn. This is, after all, their culture, and it is that culture that you have come to experience just as much as you have come for any traditional classroom experiences. If you can just step back and consider the totality of it all, the experience should be quite enlightening.

#### FROM A PARENT

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*The university was a commuter college, with faculty far less available to the students than my daughter was used to at her home university. The students there pick a field of study and stick to it, without the fluid movement through subject areas that is common in the U.S. The students in a second year have been together in their classes for at least a year. They have all taken the same schedule of classes before, thus have a common knowledge base. When my daughter joined a class that had no stated prerequisites, she was, in effect, joining a higher-level class, with no background in that subject. We did not know this, and it was a struggle for her to catch up, especially given that all classes were taught in Spanish.*

— Parent.



## FROM A STUDENT

*While at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, I primarily took classes within my major, international relations. I remember covering events in my courses between conflicts or relationships between other countries (like Iran and Israel, or Turkey and the Balkan countries) and having the United States' role (if there was one) be completely absent from the conversation. This made it hard for me to contribute to class discussions on topics I knew very little about, and I was forced to sit back and learn from my European and Turkish classmates, who were much more knowledgeable about the issues. For some of the conflicts where the U.S. was not involved, I had little to no in-depth knowledge of certain issues. It made me realize that in every class I had back at my home university, the U.S. was always included in some way. Everything I learned with international relations back home had the United States as the focal point for every issue and conflict I learned about. However, many nations do not often view world events through the same lens that Americans do.*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.

## Bathrooms

Ah, the bathroom stories! You may have heard them, and you may live to tell a few of your own. Suffice it to say that few nationalities are as particular about their personal hygiene as Americans, and bathrooms like those in the U.S. are not the norm in the rest of the world. You will find all kinds of flushing mechanisms from small to large buttons, chain pulls, foot presses, pots of water and, yes, none when it's simply a hole in the floor. You may find toilets with heated seats and a warm spray of water to wash you down, toilets facing large picture-glass windows in skyscrapers, and many toilets that don't work—even if you just paid to use them. In many places around the world, people do not flush tissue, but rather put it in the waste can in the stall. But don't expect anyone to tell you this beforehand, since bathroom etiquette is an engrained part of the culture. In many places around the world, tissue is not even used at all—just water and the left hand. Whatever the prevailing practice, you will want to be prepared before you go in. Consider carrying a small supply of toilet tissue, small tissue packets and/or moist wipes with you every day, which come in handy for all kinds of clean-up needs.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Sometimes bathrooms in Europe are hard to come by. I really needed a bathroom once, and couldn't find one that was free, so I snuck into a restaurant. I was leaving and almost got stopped, but kept going. It was hard to get used to always looking for a free bathroom, so I eventually gave up and started bringing coins with me!*

— Ashley Gaona, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

## Shopping

With a little luck, you will need to do all kinds of shopping, and will thus have the opportunity to purchase many items while abroad. If possible, try to make your first commercial forays accompanied by a local or knowledgeable friend who can explain to you both how the system works and which stores have the best merchandise and prices. You'll probably find that a supermarket—a store with aisles, carts, and lots of products—will have fixed prices and accept credit cards. But when you go shopping in local markets, usually set up on sidewalks, the street, or in other common areas or squares, you will often be able to bargain and be required to pay in cash. Bargaining, haggling, negotiating—whatever you call it—is a longstanding custom in many places around the world, and by engaging in it, you get to know people, practice your language skills, and—once you have come to accept it and learn the basics—even have some fun.

In some cultures, bargaining extends well beyond your weekly purchase of avocados or apples from a street vendor. It also applies to nonmetered taxis, motorized rickshaws, clothes, furniture, tours, guides—anything that doesn't have a listed price. And even when there are listed prices, there are often two prices: one for locals and one for tourists. Once you know this, you should at least be able to get some sort of discounted price—perhaps not what true locals pay, but not what they try to soak the tourists for either. Here are few tips to follow:

- Know where to shop (stay away the places that tourists frequent, especially when they are present).
- Know the quality and value (at least to you) of what you're buying.
- Never pay the first price offered.

- Use cash for better bargaining power, and prepare a quick sheet of equivalent values in increments so you don't overpay in the heat of the deal.
- Know the laws pertaining to the nature and quantity of the items you're buying (e.g., antiques, religious artifacts, etc.) and their exportability.
- Keep in mind that bargaining for large items means drinking tea or coffee with merchants—often lots of it.
- Don't go too low with prices, or you may risk offending the vendor.
- Enjoy yourself!

If you plan to go out shopping for more than trinkets or everyday items, go with someone who knows what they're doing so you stand a chance of not being totally ripped off. A good rule of thumb to follow, however, is that if you like what you've bought and feel that you've paid a fair price, there's no reason to feel angry, frustrated or insulted. Generally speaking, this good feeling will last right up until you run into someone who paid a lot less for the exact same item!

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Customer service in Japan was far more attentive than any experience I had ever had here in the U.S.*

— Taurean Barnwell, University of South Florida. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Japan.

*I learned the hard way that it's not appropriate to touch things in shops in Germany and many other parts of Europe. I was in a shop at the Christmas Market in Aachen. I found a collectible I wanted, went to touch it, and this really tall, old man (the shop owner) came up from behind me and swatted my hand. It was extremely awkward, and I felt so uncomfortable! I left the shop really fast and was really taken aback! Another time I was in a chocolate shop in Brugge, Belgium, with my friend. We both moved to pick up a bag of chocolate, and a shop lady raised her voice at us. It was extremely embarrassing!*

— Ashley Gaona, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I was shocked when I went shopping on Oxford Street and found that employees were less helpful than the ones that work at my local Walmart. My question of “do you have any of these in the back in a smaller size” were answered by a swift, “no,” and that was all.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

## Food

Few things are as culturally unique to a country as its food. From the types of fruits, vegetables, grains, meats eaten (or not), and spices used to the methods of cooking, cuisine is one of the richest and most established aspects of any culture. And depending on where you are, that cuisine may be already familiar to you, partially familiar, or completely unknown. Be as adventurous as you can by stepping out of your comfort zone and trying new foods, and you will be rewarded by great new experiences, and insight into the local culture. You certainly won't like everything you try, but you will probably be surprised by how much you like some completely new—even weird—things.

In addition to what is eaten, few things are more culturally-defined than how people eat, i.e., with whom, at what time, for how long, and in observance of what practices. Depending on where you live, your meals may vary from home-cooked local delicacies served every day as part of your homestay to cooking for yourself in an apartment with international students. Take your time to “break bread” and share meals with your new friends. Your experiences will include far more than just the new dishes you try; you'll create lasting friendships. Meals have a way of doing that.

Be careful, though, where and what you eat, especially at first. While some people may be able to eat off street carts in Mumbai their first day without suffering any consequences, most cannot. Know yourself, your tolerance for new foods, spices and herbs, and go easy at first. It also helps to have some Pepto-Bismol and Maalox handy. With that said, however, there are plenty of street eats that are safe, delicious and cheap: crêpes in Paris, fish tacos in Mexico, satay in Thailand, fresh-squeezed juices in Nicaragua, steaming chai in Goa. Ask your local friends to take you to places where other nonlocals have eaten and not suffered any adverse consequences.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Condiments in England are not free! Whenever I ordered fish and chips, I had to pay for each ketchup packet that I wanted.*

— Ashley Gaona, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

*I made the mistake of tipping. I do so in America, but it's not done in Ireland. After dropping a euro on the table of my first pub, I asked the gentleman next to me what the common tip amount was. He told me, "You don't tip." By this I was shocked and, not entirely believing him, I put the coin back in my pocket. I asked around, and found that you most certainly do not tip in Ireland with one exception: If you want to tip a bartender, you simply buy him a beer (preferably a Guinness).*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

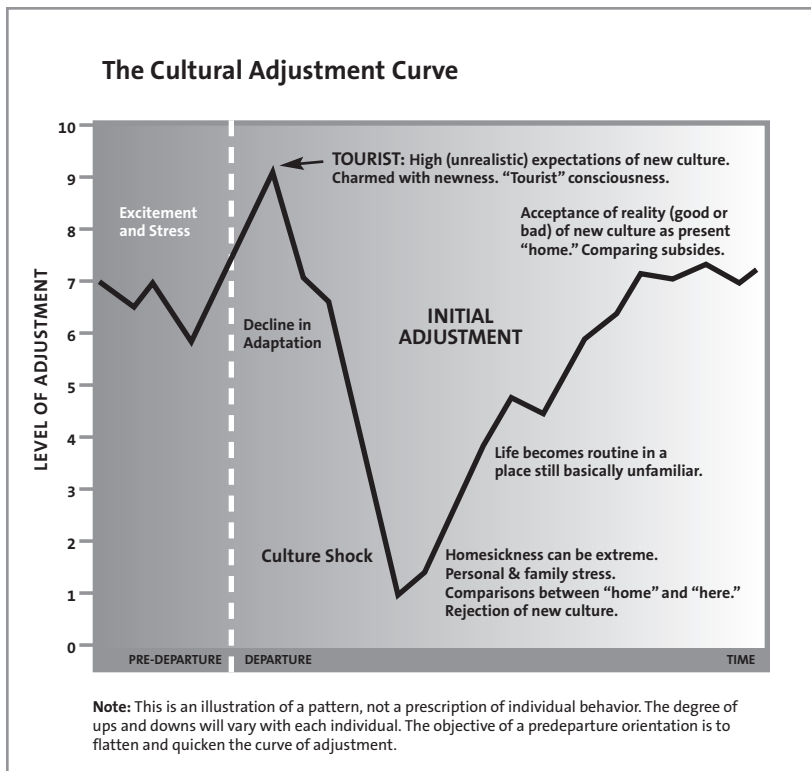
*Sticking a pair of chopsticks straight up into a bowl of rice is evocative of a tombstone in Japanese culture and should never be done while eating at the table!*

— Taurean Barnwell, University of South Florida. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Japan.

It all sounds good, right? But what if you have a hard time overcoming some of your shock over certain aspects of the culture? What if, in addition to the differences in classes, bathrooms, shopping and food, there are more subtle differences that are even more difficult to deal with? What if one moment you're thrilled to be there, high on excitement and the adventure—but the next, you're missing your friends and family and feeling dumb about the stupid mistakes you keep making? In the beginning, you may find that your uncertainty is increasing. This happens because the more you learn, the more you realize you don't know what you're doing, resulting in increasing discomfort and uncertainty. Don't worry—you're not alone.

## Understanding and Dealing with Culture Shock

Culture shock is one of the most widely discussed and often misunderstood aspects of any international experience. Technically speaking, culture shock is the confusion, disorientation, and emotional upheaval that comes from immersion in a new culture. For example, you may be tired of using frustrating and confusing public transportation that doesn't seem to work well. Maybe you're exhausted from making yourself understood all the time and just want to speak with someone like you. Even just standing out, looking foreign, bothers many people abroad. These minor problems balloon into massive problems. You feel like an outsider and may even be depressed. You are experiencing culture shock.



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Culture shock typically follows a three-phased cycle starting with a honeymoon period when everything feels grand. But fabulous turns to frustration, depression and confusion, often triggered by an event involving seemingly minor cultural differences. All usually ends well, however, as the recovery phase restores equilibrium after you've regained confidence and learned to appreciate the culture as a whole. A little bit wiser, you're able to move on. International newbies are often either overly optimistic ("I won't have any trouble adjusting") or overly pessimistic ("Everyone takes six months to get used to the basics before they can do anything productive").

You may have heard some people say that they don't experience culture shock. Well, odds are, they did, but perhaps didn't recognize it as such, or they're too embarrassed to share their stories. Worse still, they might not have immersed themselves in the local culture, and so were never exposed to it to the point where they had to confront their discomfort in the first place. That would be sad, and we certainly don't recommend that you take that approach. Culture shock is a learning experience and leads to broader perspectives, more tolerance, and greater appreciation for your new culture and your home culture. It's important that you prepare for culture shock, and learn how to deal with it. Doing so is one of the best ways to experience the deep personal growth of life abroad, as so many others have.

### **TIPS FOR DEALING WITH CULTURE SHOCK**

- **Assume differences until similarity is proven.**
- **Relate to individuals, not a "culture."**
- **Work with a culture rather than against it.**
- **Ask "what do I need to understand?" not "what should I do?"**
- **Listen and observe, think and then talk.**
- **Focus on the benefits of differences rather than simply trying to avoid mistakes.**

## FROM A STUDENT

*The bad news about culture shock and homesickness is that they're both pretty much inevitable when you're abroad. The good news is that if everyone else can overcome them, there's no reason you can't, too.*

— Nate Nault, College of the Holy Cross. Studied abroad in Scotland.  
Spending postgraduate gap year in China.

*When I studied abroad in England, I found there wasn't a huge cultural difference, and I had a fairly easy time meeting people and building lasting friendships. In Switzerland, though, I went through a three-month language immersion program to improve my French, and it helped me integrate much better. Switzerland can be a much colder place (figuratively and literally), and I had to work a lot harder to make friends with the locals. I would say being persistent and positive are two important traits that helped me integrate into my new surroundings.*

— Brian Hardin, University of Texas at Austin. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in England. Awarded a Fulbright to Switzerland

*My advice is to meet the people in the culture before you make judgments. That's what I did wrong; I pre-judged, and so I shut down and didn't want to go out. So really make sure you go and try everything out, and try to learn about the culture as best as you can. Sometimes when the group was going out and I didn't want to go, my roommate would push me to go out. She had been abroad before and she was helpful.*

— Stephanie, a student with depression and anxiety, University of South Florida. Studied abroad in Malaysia.

In fact, almost everyone who spends a significant time abroad experiences some degree of culture shock with every major cultural transition—whether moving to a new culture, or dealing with a new cultural group or sub-culture at home. You can experience a type of culture shock if you are working on a project on your home campus with a group of diverse people from different backgrounds, or returning to the U.S. after time abroad. Whatever your encounters are, you will need to develop coping mechanisms.



Once you've spent time in cross-cultural environments, you will learn to recognize your own pattern of adjustment to new experiences. You will put to good use the coping mechanisms that work best for you. By giving yourself the space, time, and other support you need to adjust, you can smooth your transition and develop your own culture shock absorbers. This adaptability is important because you will need to cope and move on—not let these encounters stymie your growth or experiences—so you can continue to study and eventually work productively across cultures.

That said, if you find that your case of culture shock has become a consistent, awful strain that gets worse rather than better, take it as a warning sign, and consider reaching out to your sending program or local adviser for help. Most students find that like subsequent ripples from a stone being thrown in a pond, the height and frequency of culture shock waves should diminish with time. This is why many students wish afterwards that they had stayed abroad longer; they recognize that it does get easier with time. But in the beginning you'll need to learn to adapt. Here are some tips from TMC, a Berlitz company with the mission of helping multinational companies leverage differences and similarities for maximum performance:

#### QUICK TIP



***One of the best ways to ensure success on your international adventure is to listen carefully so as to figure out what's going on and why.***

## Surviving the Adjustment Curve

- Self-awareness is crucial; remember that your reactions and emotions are normal.
- Reach out to people who have already gone through this adjustment cycle; they can give you suggestions and support as you navigate through your own adjustment.

- Don't spend time with fellow study abroad students who exhibit a consistently negative attitude toward your host country; they can drag you down.
- Make an effort to meet people and make friends with people in your host culture.
- Look for positive aspects of every experience.
- Be open to learning about the host culture, ask questions, and attempt to understand behaviors instead of judging them.
- Set small goals for yourself initially; adjustment is gradual.
- Take care of yourself physically; make sure you get enough sleep and keep a proper diet.
- Adjust your schedule to the rhythm of the host culture (i.e., meal times, study habits, time off).
- Learn the new language; don't be afraid to make mistakes.
- Make plans to stay in touch with friends and family at home.
- Maintain your usual stress outlets, such as exercise.
- Keep your sense of humor!

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*Listening and observation skills are important to apply at all times, especially to understand the language, culture and traditions.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

*Get acclimated with your surroundings. Don't jump right into traveling to different countries/cities. Acclimating to your surroundings and your new home will really help you feel like you are "home." It will also help cut down on the feeling of homesickness and assist you in learning about the fun things to do right where you're studying.*

— Carolyn Siska, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Italy.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*As time came closer to leaving for Slovakia, I became more anxious about the whole prospect of living abroad for a year. It took a week or so in Slovakia to become excited again by this opportunity. My host family, Fulbright friends, Slovak friends and students really played a big part in helping me thrive in Slovakia. I did have my mini-crises brought on by stress (usually a broken printer) typical of the crisis stage of culture shock. I really started to enjoy living in another culture during the second semester. I had more friends, and everything was not as overwhelming as at the start [despite deaths at home in that time]. My friends (roommates, host family, Fulbright friends) helped me to deal with this loss. When looking back, the weather played more of a role than I would like to admit. My hardest months in Slovakia were those where the temperature was below freezing and the sun set at 4 p.m., and I did not want to leave my apartment.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.

Savvy internationalists also remember that the toughest bouts of culture shock often happen when transitioning “home.” This reverse culture shock or re-entry shock also requires coping techniques—and preparation. Read more on this topic in Chapter 9.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I remember feeling angry during my early days in China and thinking that everyone was doing things wrong when finally I realized that I was experiencing culture shock. The curt behavior I saw from people and the procedures people made me go through were just the norm, and once I accepted it, I wasn't as angry anymore and had an easier time.*

— Eamon Devine, Johnson County Community College. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in China.

*My host mom sent me to the store because we were out of milk. By that point in my stay, I knew better than to trust an English translation that I read (I don't think I saw a single correct one my entire time there), but I was in a hurry, and the milk at the store down the street had the side of the carton with the English writing facing out of the refrigerator, so I grabbed it and paid without thinking. When I got home, my host mom called me into the*

*kitchen and pointed out the English translators had forgotten to translate just one of the Spanish words: *agria*, the word for sour. I had just purchased expired milk. When I asked my host mom why on earth sour milk was for sale, she explained that it was used to alleviate stomach aches. Naturally, I then tried to explain that expired milk is actually kind of poisonous, to which she responded, “no, it makes delicious milkshakes.” I decided not to argue and went back down the road to the little store to exchange the milk, but found that the refrigerator contained only sour milk, so I asked the clerk for help. She then explained that they keep the regular milk out on the sidewalk rather than in the refrigerator.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

*On the day I was leaving Osaka to return home, I took a taxi to get to the bus depot to catch a bus to the airport. After I got out of the taxi and he drove off, I realized that I had left my cell phone and book inside the car. I went to a nearby bus dispatcher and told him in my rudimentary Japanese that I forgot my things inside the taxi. He picked up a radio and started making calls and somehow got in touch with the taxi driver. He then handed me the radio and said, “Explain to him your situation.” I was somehow able to convey to the taxi driver that I left some things inside the taxi. He said he would try to get them back to me. Disheartened, I got on the bus about to depart for the airport, prepared to abandon my U.S. cell phone and the book I brought along. Twenty minutes into the ride to the airport, the bus stopped and the taxi driver boarded the bus! He chatted with the driver, found me, and handed me my bag of my lost items. He went out of his way to make sure I got my stuff before going home and made an indelible impression on me.*

— Taurean Barnwell, University of South Florida. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Japan.

## Don't be Too Hard on Yourself

Cultural mistakes and bungling are part and parcel of the international experience. As the old saying goes, the only way to never make a mistake is to never do anything at all. So be gentle on yourself, and try to be understanding when others goof up, too. If you don't already know how to laugh at yourself and your mistakes, it's time to start! Don't hesitate to use gentle humor publicly (especially about yourself), as it can dissolve cultural barriers quickly.

At the same time, try to learn from each of your mistakes (and from those you see others making), so that you don't make the same ones over and over. Never fear—there will be plenty of new mistakes to make as you continue to try new things. Unconditional acceptance is one of the most important requirements of a truly successful experience abroad. You have to let your barriers fall and accept new ways of interaction, new ways of thinking, and new ways of living. Only then will you begin to understand that our world is indeed a very large and complicated place, with countless paths to countless ends.

**QUICK TIP**

***Do your best to keep a positive attitude by figuring out early on what refills your tank, and buoys you up.***

## Have Fun!

You are about to embark on one of the most exciting journeys of your lifetime. Along with the excitement, however, will come some inevitable challenges. You should know going in that some days will be less enjoyable than others and that some will be downright dark and difficult. Keep a positive attitude and make sure you have coping mechanisms in place to get you through some of the difficult moments.

**FROM A STUDENT**

*In U.S. grocery stores, I'm used to letting my goods be scanned, go down the conveyor belt, and be met by someone who bags them. The first time I went to a grocery store in Paris, my goods were scanned, sent down the conveyor belt, and there they sat until I realized that no one was going to bag them. All eyes were on me from the line I was holding up. It made for a quick lesson, and I never held up a line again!*

— Amy Newman, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in France.

## ROMANCE/DATING

In our ever-smaller and more interconnected world, cross-cultural dating is becoming increasingly common, in many different contexts. But be thoughtful before getting too involved, and speak with returned students for advice. There can be many traps for young people getting romantically involved abroad, from standard relationship entanglements, to the complexities of cultures that may take any form of intimate contact much more seriously than Americans sometimes do, to the dangers of criminal networks that use the offer of sensual or sexual contact to entrap unwary visitors. That said, for some people the whirlwind fantasy romance of a temporary stay overseas can add immeasurably to the experience. Most certainly, there are some things you can only learn about a culture through intimacy!

### FROM A STUDENT

*It was a Thanksgiving party. A group of American students including myself had decided to share our holiday with some of the other international students. I was sitting on the couch, when another girl came to sit down. I graciously slid over and everybody in the room broke into laughter. She looked at me slightly offended, and shocked. I realized she was French and been leaning over to kiss me on my cheeks in greeting. Now I was the shocked one, embarrassed by how unintentionally rude I had been. While in China, I found cultural misunderstandings had a way of cropping where least expected, but that a wide smile, willingness to laugh at myself, and desire to understand other cultures went a long way.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

*It's okay to not be "having the time of your life" ALL the time. You will, at times, become frustrated, discouraged, and downright confused while living abroad. This is completely normal and, I would argue, necessary in order to have a meaningful abroad experience.*

— Claire Harrison, University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Studied abroad in Italy.



# TOP TIPS

## **Top 10 Tips for Immersing Yourself in the Culture**

1. *Take your cross-cultural preparation seriously.*
2. *Request cross-cultural training.*
3. *Seek out others who've gone before you.*
4. *Embrace your new home and friends to be made.*
5. *Explore your neighborhood, the campus, and public transportation.*
6. *Serve as a cultural ambassador.*
7. *Recognize the signs of culture shock and how to deal with it.*
8. *Don't be too hard on yourself if you make mistakes.*
9. *Pay attention and listen carefully.*
10. *Have fun!*





CHAPTER 7

## Staying Safe and Healthy While Studying Abroad

By now you should be getting a good idea why studying abroad offers such a tremendous opportunity to grow personally and intellectually, and do so in ways that aren't possible on your home campus. But perhaps you're also getting a little scared. You are, after all, venturing into the unknown, and dealing with all the differences you are sure to encounter can be daunting and requires courage. But you've already left your campus, family and friends back home, right? So you *are* brave! Just remember, being brave doesn't mean being stupid or taking foolish risks. We want you to be adventurous, but we also want you to avoid any serious misadventures.

Safety may not be your biggest worry, and rightfully so. The odds of your having a safe and incident-free study abroad experience are in your favor regardless of where you go. Some destinations, particularly those in Western Europe, may actually be safer than your campus back home. Others, however, particularly those in developing countries with high poverty or unemployment rates, may be less so. But chances are that you will still be safe; you'll just have to be more circumspect about what you do.

Still, make no mistake about it: there are inherent risks in traveling, studying, working and living abroad, and you have to be prepared for them. Natural disasters, for example, can strike anywhere, and some may be more common in your host country than in the United States. Moreover, their effects can be exacerbated by the inferior infrastructure typically found in poorer countries. Political unrest can also

happen, as we have seen recently throughout the Middle East, with the result that Americans overseas can suddenly be cut off from contact with friends and families back home. Things can also go wrong on a personal level, including everything from health problems to financial crises brought about by poor budgeting skills. We've addressed predeparture measures to take care of your health and finances in previous chapters. This chapter focuses on staying safe while abroad.



#### QUICK TIP

***Be careful about just hopping in a taxi at the airport without knowing exactly where you're going and the going rate to get there. You can easily get ripped off.***

Even if you feel completely comfortable with the inherent risks, you still must think about personal safety. Whether you are only staying in one place or planning to travel widely throughout a whole region, make sure you understand the dangers. Plan ahead to avoid them, and know where to turn for help if you need it. Among the best sources of information are:

#### Best Information Resources

- The U.S. Department of State issues travel advisories and up-to-date information underscoring the importance of remaining vigilant and security-conscious, especially in those countries where extra caution is warranted.
- The U.S. Department of State also offers safe travel tips—a comprehensive list of action steps to take both before you depart and while traveling.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides detailed information on staying healthy while traveling, from lists of required recommendations to tips on food and water safety to reports of sudden outbreaks of disease.

- Travel guides and books and websites focused on living abroad offer valuable health and safety information, not only about countries or cities in general, but also about specific locations.

## Familiarize Yourself with Local Laws

Once you are actually on foreign soil, you are subject to that country's laws. To be sure, many of the laws will be similar to the ones you have learned to abide by in the United States. But some will be different (some stricter, others more lenient) and some will apply to situations that you just don't encounter back home. Pleading ignorance may get you off the hook in some minor cases, but you can't count on it. Therefore, *before you go*, learn as much as you can about the local laws of the places you plan to visit. In addition to those resources listed in Chapter 5, look for information in your library, from your study abroad program adviser, reputable online resources, travel guides, and the embassies, consulates or tourist bureaus of the country you'll be studying in. Talk with recently returned fellow students about any run-ins that they might have encountered and any local laws you should be specifically aware of.

### BE ESPECIALLY AWARE UPON ARRIVAL

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the very moment that you arrive in a new country is one of the times when you are at greatest risk of becoming the victim of crime. You may be exhausted and suffering from jetlag. But at the same time, you're excited about finally being abroad, and that eagerness to engage can blind you to the dangers that may be lying in wait as you emerge from an airport or train station, unfamiliar with your surroundings, carrying all of your valuables, and definitely standing out as a foreigner. Therefore, you should follow the "Use Common Sense" tips in this chapter for staying safe the moment you land in your host country, as well as research how to use transportation from the airport.

## Get to Know Your New Neighborhood

Always familiarize yourself with your new surroundings as quickly as conveniently possible. For study abroad students, that typically means both the academic campus and the immediate environs of wherever it is that you will be living. When you register with the international student office on campus during your first few days, ask about the safest routes to and from campus, not just the cheapest or most convenient. Ask fellow students, campus security, and your host family, if you have one, about which parts of town are safe and unsafe during the day or night and even days of the week. For more tips, see Chapter 6.

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### FROM A PARENT

*I feel strongly that we weren't given enough information about the city our daughter was to live in, nor about the university she would attend. She had lived in Washington, DC, at college, so we knew that she would be fine living in an urban setting. We did not know, however, that her house, and all the houses in her middle-class neighborhood, would be surrounded on all sides by a fence that needed to be unlocked to get to the house. Her view from her bedroom window was of graffiti-covered walls. The city was dark with narrow streets, with a bus system that did not have a printed schedule because the buses never stuck to a schedule. To safely take a taxi, she was only to take a red taxi with certain markings on it. This is contrary to information given at her campus orientation to "grab a taxi at the airport."*

— Parent.

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### FROM A STUDENT

*When I went to Germany, I really wished that I had found the nearest pharmacy (Apotheke) and the list that each one has of which ones are open for 24 hours on which days. In Berlin, no pharmacies are open 24/7, but a group of them within a neighborhood rotate which days one of them will stay open all night. Not knowing this, I woke up at 2 a.m. early in my stay with a terrible flu only to find that the only place I knew of to buy medicine was closed for the next five hours. I certainly wasn't in Boston anymore with a 24/7 CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid, you name it, within walking distance.*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica. Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I always walk with a purpose, not meandering and wandering distractedly like a sightseer. I pay close attention to my gut feelings and I do let first impressions color my judgment in terms of trusting people.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

## Getting Lost

It is always unnerving to get lost. But in a completely new place where you don't know the language very well and you often don't even know where you are trying to go, it can be downright frightening. Try to avoid getting lost in the first place by doing your research and checking your directions, your routing, or the method of transportation you plan to employ with someone who knows. A good way to get the lay of the land is to just go out exploring, but purposefully and with a map. You can get a great sense of the streets, the neighborhoods, and places of interest without the pressure of actually having to get somewhere new by a certain time.

Invariably, however, you are going to get lost, and probably sooner rather than later, since the longer you are in any one place, the more familiar you will become with it. So don't panic. Stay calm so as not to arouse the suspicion of those who may be inclined to prey on your vulnerability. If you need directions, don't ask just anyone. Look for an authority figure first, be it a policeman (or woman), a traffic warden, or a uniformed public servant. Failing that, step into a store, restaurant or hotel and ask for directions. And don't venture back out again until you are convinced that you have been sent in the right direction and have a tangible landmark to pass in fairly short order to prove it.

## Use Common Sense

No matter how well you know the language and your way around, plain old common sense will play a key role in keeping you safe. Ignore these tips at your peril!

- **Protect your valuables.** Bring little of any real value with you when you go out and about, and only a copy of your passport photo page—not your passport itself unless the situation requires it. Email yourself a copy of your passport and any other important information, such as credit card numbers and bank accounts, so that if any of them are lost or stolen, you can go online and get a copy. Use a money belt and carry small bills for quick purchases.
- **Be smart with your money.** Manage your money, know what things cost, do not wave your money around, and stick to your budget, as running out of cash is risky business.
- **Keep your family/friends apprised** of your whereabouts, especially when traveling. If people know generally where you are and when you're supposed to either arrive at your next destination or return, they can sound the alarm in a much timelier manner.
- **Maintain a low profile.** Clothes, mannerisms, language and even guidebooks and maps make you stand out as a nonnative. The more you blend in, the less likely you will be singled out as a target of crime.
- **Don't walk around at night alone.** You may feel safe, and the city or country may be safe, but why court trouble? No place, after all, is safer at night than it is during broad daylight. And there's always more safety in numbers, especially if you get lost or run into trouble.
- **Don't take shortcuts, back alleys, or poorly lit streets.** Even if you're in a hurry, it's better to be late than waylaid. Stick with wide, well-trodden streets that are well lit and well known.
- **Don't accept food or drinks from strangers** as they may be tampered with. If you start to feel unusual or intoxicated, find your friends or official help, such as a police officer, immediately. Since there will be no way of knowing what you've been given, you will probably need to go to the hospital.

- **Don't get drunk.** It's only natural that you are going to want to party with your new friends. Just go easy and don't lose control. And if the site of your activity is off campus, go with friends.
- **Don't use drugs.** If drugs are illegal, don't use them—period, even if you are already familiar with them and their effect on you. For starters, some countries' laws are extremely strict and there will be no way to weasel out of being caught with them. In addition, they may be adulterated or of poor quality. And even where drugs are legal, stay away and stay in control.
- **Practice safe sex.** Travel prepared with condoms and don't take any stupid risks.
- **Don't allow yourself to get cornered** into a situation or location with someone you don't know well, such as a car, an apartment, or a deserted beach or park.
- **Stay away from high-crime areas.** If you're aware that certain parts of town are unsavory, just stay away from them. If there's a reason that you really must go there, go with a trusted local friend and only during daylight hours.
- **Be aware of anti-American sentiment.** You really can't do anything about pervasive or persistent anti-American feelings. But you can downplay being conspicuously American. In the old days, this often consisted of wearing a jacket containing an image of the Canadian flag. But it is much wiser just to try to look like you could be from any number of Western nations. Register with the STEP program on the U.S. State Department's website, and use the buddy system.
- **Pay attention to the news.** What you don't know can hurt you, so keep up with local events. For example, a transportation workers' strike might leave you stuck somewhere you don't want to be. Upcoming elections may spark political demonstrations. Or there may be a fresh rash of robberies on certain modes of public transportation in certain areas.
- **Look out for scams.** Unfortunately, travelers of all types have fallen victim to common scams designed to get you to part with your money one way or another. Be wary of giving or lending people money, and watch out for any bargain that looks too good to be true—it probably is!

## FROM A STUDENT

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*My first trip alone in China was to visit an orphanage in Qinghai province, a relatively remote region. My first night there, I woke up as someone walked out of my room around 5 a.m. I was still half asleep, confused, and incredibly scared. When I went to call my parents, I realized my phone had been stolen and broke down into tears. My phone wasn't expensive, but it was my easiest and quickest means of contacting my family. By the time I reached my parents, they reminded me to think about what really matters. I was safe, the staff at the orphanage I was visiting were looking out for me, and I still had my passport. What seemed a big deal at the time seemed a lot smaller even three hours later.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

*I felt someone brush the back pockets of my jeans, but assumed it was my girlfriend who was on the trip with me. I thought nothing of it until I saw that she was standing several feet away from me but also noticed the back of a young woman walking away from my group. Luckily I always keep my wallet in my front pocket and safety pin it closed.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*My group and I traveled to many different types of cities throughout my semester abroad, but safety was always a top priority. We found that downloading an offline map of each city to our phones helped tremendously. Even if we didn't speak the language, it was much easier to figure out our location and directions with a guide in our hands.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.



## Staying Healthy

Staying healthy while studying abroad should be one of your top priorities. Ending up sick or injured during your overseas stay can have an adverse effect on the amount you learn, how much fun you have, and what you take away from your experience. But it doesn't have to be that way—with a little bit of planning, you can make time to study, have fun, and stay healthy. A healthy body can help you fight off illnesses and recover faster if you do get sick, so try to stay fit and exercise while abroad, even though it may be harder to follow a structured workout routine.

### MAKE SMART CHOICES

- **Make healthy food choices (late nights, sugary snacks, and too much time spent indoors can quickly result in a less than optimal state of health).**
- **Take the time to get exercise.**
- **Walk or bike as much as you can.**
- **Go out dancing!**
- **Join an intramural athletic team.**
- **Ask around for the best running trails, parks or circuits but be careful: depending on distance and your location, you may encounter less-than-safe neighborhoods.**
- **Watch your food portion control.**
- **Practice safe sex to protect yourself from STDs.**
- **Go easy on alcohol.**
- **Find out if water is safe to drink in the countries in which you will be traveling. Where appropriate, only drink from sealed water bottles. Remember that in some countries, ice can also be unsafe, as well as the water you use to brush your teeth.**

Staying healthy abroad is not difficult; you have to make smart choices. Find the balance between having a great time, enjoying the foods, seeing the sights, and staying healthy.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I was fully expecting to gain weight after five months in Paris with all of the cheese, bread and wine. But I didn't, and I think it's because I took full advantage of what was available to me. While living in Paris I went to a market every night on the way home from school and bought fresh, local, unprocessed ingredients to make dinner. It was surprisingly cheap and always delicious. In addition, I walked anywhere and everywhere I could. Not only was it great exercise, but it was also the perfect way to see the city. Gyms are very expensive in Paris; they're also not as common to the lifestyle as they are in America. I didn't want to spend an exorbitant amount of money nor did I want to live my life the way I had lived it for 20 years at home, so it was a great compromise for me to walk as exercise. Sure, the metro is convenient, but if you're constantly underground you never know what you're missing above ground.*

— Amy Newman, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in France.

*I started taking yoga classes almost four times a week. Beyond giving me an extensive Mandarin vocabulary for body parts, means of breathing and forms of posture, the yoga classes kept me in shape and flexible. In addition, one of my closest friends and I decided to make it a game to try as many new fruits and vegetables as we could. It made staying healthy a novel experience that was part of being in another country.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

*Diet is the most important health factor for me, and since there are fit, active people all over the world, I try to find athletic locals wherever I am.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

*I frequently went on hiking day trips in the area that helped me to stay active, and I enrolled in yoga classes through the university, which I attended twice a week. Since food in South Africa is relatively inexpensive compared to the U.S., it was easy to find food and cuisines that were affordable, delicious and healthy.*

— Isabelle Feldhaus, University of Southern California. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in South Africa.

## Staying Safe on the Roads

Just as they are here in the United States, motor vehicle accidents—not terrorism, crime, infectious diseases, or plane crashes—are the number one killer of healthy Americans abroad. While many countries' roadways are actually safer than ours, there can still be accidents. But those in the developing world can be downright dangerous. The reasons for this are many: roads are often poorly maintained, and laws, enforcement and driver training are often weak or nonexistent. Nor are most of the vehicles themselves generally well maintained, meaning that brake failures, steering failures and blowouts are much more common. Vehicles that would be summarily barred from our highways are routinely seen racing down crowded highways abroad.

### QUICK TIP



***Always have enough cash on you to be able to take a taxi back from wherever it is that you are going.***

We therefore encourage you not to rent a car unless you really need to. Also take great care when riding as a passenger. Avoid taxis without seatbelts. Only take buses from an established and recommended company. Try to travel during daylight hours and avoid crowded buses and trains. Opt for the safest route, not the cheapest or the fastest. The U.S. Department of State has country-specific traffic safety and road condition information, which is updated roughly twice a year and accessed through a pull-down list on its website. The Association of Safe International Road travel also provides good information. See <http://asirt.org>.

## Train Travel

Trains are the preferred mode of intercity transportation in many parts of the world. Overnight trains, in particular, provide a cheap, convenient and even magical way to take you to faraway destinations. But train quality varies widely around the

## RUNNERS AROUND THE WORLD

Although taking a run is a great way to experience a city, not every culture is accustomed to Americans jogging through their streets. In some, it seems downright strange, and you may be stared at—even stopped if people think you’ve done something wrong or are running for help. If you are a committed runner, it’s a good idea to get the lay of the land from others who’ve gone before you—or even from online running groups. Find out what the running culture is in your host country. If you are a woman, pay attention to what you wear: short running shorts and tank tops may not be acceptable in many countries. You should also vary your running patterns to avoid being targeted.

Many runners enjoy meeting up around the world with like-minded runners through local running clubs. If this is important to you, you may want to locate a local running club in advance using resources such as Run the Planet’s worldwide directory [www.runtheplanet.com/resources/clubs](http://www.runtheplanet.com/resources/clubs). Some students and travelers have connected with local branches of the Hash House Harriers, a loose global network of running clubs. HHH clubs can be a way to meet new friends and see off-the-beaten-track corners of your new location safely. However, students should be aware that some local HHH groups have developed heavy drinking cultures, while others may tolerate levels of sexual pressure/harassment between members that you may find offensive, or have other practices you may just not want to be involved with. As with any social group, you should always test the waters carefully before getting too involved. Never head off anywhere remote alone or with people you have just met.



### QUICK TIP

***Whenever you leave your campus or neighborhood with a group of new people, try to bring along someone you already know from your university or study abroad program.***

world. A trip from Calcutta to Varanasi will be quite a different experience than one from Frankfurt to Berlin. Some trains run like clockwork, others are considerably less reliable.

Wherever you travel by train, there are certain basic precepts you should follow. Be sure to keep your ticket and receipt, as these often have to be shown again when leaving the station at your destination. Never leave your bags unattended when you go to the dining car, the restroom, or especially if you step down onto the platform during a stop. If you can, lock your compartment in addition to locking your bags. But carry all valuables with you. If you are travelling in a group, take turns watching your bags. If you're traveling alone, tie your bag to a post or keep a strap wrapped around you to prevent someone from snatching it while you are reading, napping, or otherwise inattentive.

## Being a Woman Abroad

It is an unfortunate and unfair fact of life, but as a woman, you must be even more careful than your male counterparts about your safety while abroad. And this means not taking chances, even ones that you might feel perfectly justified taking on your home campus. Growing up in the U.S. has given you a perspective on gender roles that may be significantly different from those of your host country. In addition, most cultures will have impressions of "what women are like" from your part of the world—impressions acquired mostly through American movies and television shows. We all know how unrealistic those can be, but the foreigners who view them don't necessarily. So you need to know what those perceptions are and be prepared to encounter them. The most pernicious of these, and the one that you need to be most on guard against, is that American women are typically cheap and easy.

Unfortunately, you can find yourself enforcing that stereotype without even meaning to by the way you smile, make eye contact, strike up conversations, or just hang around male students. This is because cultural norms can be deceptively different. What may signify absolutely nothing to you or any other American may speak volumes to people abroad. It's important to remember that local people will view you through their cultural lenses, not yours. And for women especially, misinterpretations can have unpleasant and even dangerous consequences.

So as much as we appreciate your right to your individuality, it's important for your safety that you respect the culture of your host country by dressing and behaving appropriately. It's best to err on the conservative side until you completely understand local norms.

### SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR WOMEN

- Be aware that in many countries, women do not have equal rights.
- Don't be caught by surprise; be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Err on the side of caution when it comes to strangers.
- Always have cash hidden on your person.
- Be conservative in how you dress, especially at night and when it's hot outside.
- Don't plan to arrive late at night or alone at a place you aren't already familiar with.
- Always use the front entrance to your hostel/apartment.
- Don't walk alone at night unless it's absolutely necessary.
- Use common sense and put safety first.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Sexual harassment towards women in Egypt was a real challenge. On a daily basis, I had to assert myself on the streets and ignore the sexual comments or refrain from certain conversations. Once I noticed I was being followed, so I stopped my friend and watched the young man hesitate because he did not know what to do. Then he approached me and I kindly asked him what he was doing. After he realized I knew he was following me, he felt embarrassed and left. Sometimes confronting the situation in a respectful manner causes the person to react and leave you alone.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

*I think that a good sense of cultural awareness is really important when talking about sexual harassment. What is considered commonplace, expected—and even polite—flirtation in some cultures can be considered flagrant misconduct in others.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

#### FROM A STUDENT

*I had not before experienced a sense of my own body's utility. In Britain and the United States, my mind and the emotional bonds I created with others were highly valued, but my body was consistently and indisputably "without utility." In Nepal, my hands cooked food, which a man and 12 children ate, swept floors, made beds and fed babies; my arms and legs carried children, water jugs, milk cans, and food staples; and my fingers mended holes in clothing ... And so, in the process of cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children in a rural village of Nepal, I have never encountered such discrimination as a woman—and such equality as a young woman with a disability.*

— Megan Smith, who uses a power wheelchair, Soka University of America. Volunteered abroad in Nepal.

## Sexual Advances and Assault

Most women report receiving many more sexual advances while traveling overseas than they do at home. There are many reasons for this, including cultural differences, easier access to alcohol, and a lack of familiarity with support services (locals know that women probably don't know where to turn for help). For example, some men may think that since you are traveling internationally, you must be strong and confident, and hence "fair game." Or that since you don't have a man right there in your life, that you must crave sex. Some may want to take advantage of the fact that you are in a foreign place and hence may not know how to call for help. Or most commonly, they feel they have nothing to lose by trying their luck on the American, since the worst you can say is "no," and this will involve few if any negative social consequences for them.

Sometimes, unfortunately, it isn't just an overt advance or proposition. Sometimes a woman drinks too much or someone slips something into her drink. Sometimes

a woman accepts a ride or walks off with a new friend, but suddenly finds herself in a deserted place with little chance of being heard if she yells for help. Although these examples are anecdotal, we've heard them from hundreds of women who've studied and traveled abroad.

In an effort to quantify the number of sexual assaults on American women studying abroad, Middlebury College conducted a study of more than 200 returning study abroad women. The findings are startling: women who had studied abroad were three times as likely to be the victim of an attempted sexual assault and five times more likely to have been raped than women who had remained at home. The vast majority of the offenders were not other college students, but citizens of the country where the women were studying. The report went on to cite cultural differences, weak social networks, and easier access to alcohol as possible contributing factors.

## Minimizing the Risks

- **Ask your study abroad program in advance for information.** Make sure you ask for country-specific information and statistics on women, gender roles and sexual assault, as well as tips on how to prevent sexual assault and what to do if something happens.
- **Take a self-defense course.** Knowing even the first thing about how to defend yourself could make all the difference in the world should you find yourself in an unpleasant situation. A thorough knowledge of self-defense should equip you to protect yourself against all but the most forceful of attempted assaults.
- **Don't be too carefree.** Yes, study abroad is all about trying new foods, meeting new people, exploring and soaking up local culture. But you shouldn't overdo it or be stupid about it. Keep your safety first and foremost at all times, and if you don't think you can handle a situation that arises by yourself, call for help.
- **Don't get drunk.** Intoxication and a lack of familiarity with your environment is a dangerous combination. Losing control makes you very vulnerable, and there are people who will take advantage of that.
- **Don't drink "alone."** If you want to party, implement a buddy system so that one person stays completely sober.



- **Use the same common sense you would in the United States.** Don't get in a car or take a walk with someone you don't know, and certainly don't go home with someone you don't know. If you're feeling threatened, go with your instincts and find a safe place to call a taxi or speak to a policeman.

### If It Happens to You

- **Report the incident.** Should a physical assault actually happen, have a friend or campus counselor accompany you to the police station or hospital to report it. You may be asked to give samples and take certain tests. Each country treats assault and rape very differently, so stay as calm as possible, file a report, and contact the U.S. embassy. As the victim of a crime, you will be able to seek help from the U.S. consular office (see below for specifics).
- **Seek out support/counseling.** If you do suffer from an assault, ask your local program contact for advice on where and how to get counseling while still in your host country. If they don't know, ask the U.S. Consular officer for help. Be sure to seek out assistance once you return to your home campus, as well.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Sexual advances and discrimination against women are both frustrating and offensive, but it's important to recognize that these behaviors do not represent all Egyptian society. It is easy to generalize or be dismissive; instead, I think it's more productive to try to understand why and take preventive measures to minimize or avoid it happening to you.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

### Traveling with Disabilities

Countries have widely varying accessibility standards and practices for disabled travelers. Some countries have rigorous nondiscrimination laws that help protect travelers with disabilities, others have only minimal laws or none at all. If you have dis-

ability-related needs, prepare thoroughly before you go to ensure an accessible, safe and enjoyable time abroad. You should discuss the trip with your doctor and your study abroad adviser to ensure that your needs will be met.

- **Research in advance:** Learn about the country, the campus or host family, and the city. Ask questions about what services are available. Consider the level of health care available, as well as local transportation needs to and from the airport and luggage assistance. When making reservations, inform the travel agent or carrier about your disability and the equipment that you use, and, if necessary, request that a wheelchair be brought to the gate upon arrival. Ask specifically for any other assistance needed while flying and at the airport. Rules for accommodating passengers with disabilities vary greatly between U.S. carriers and other airlines. Ask that your needs and requests be documented as part of the reservation, and take down the name of the agent.
- **Seek medical advice:** Talk to your physician about the activities you have planned and your general physical condition, any immunizations that might be needed, and all medications—prescription and over the counter—that you might need for your trip. Carry a letter from him or her describing your medical condition in full and any prescription medications, including the names of generic alternatives.
- **Bring your medications:** If you take prescription medication, make sure you have enough to last the duration of the trip, including extra medicine in case you are delayed. Pack your medication in your carry-on bag, since checked baggage is occasionally lost. Always carry your prescriptions in their labeled containers, not in a pill pack.
- **Bring copies of documentation of immunizations:** Take with you proper documentation of immunizations.
- **Get adequate health and evacuation insurance:** Make sure you have adequate health insurance coverage while abroad, including medical evacuation, which is not covered by most domestic policies. Note that U.S. government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.
- **Have your medical equipment checked out:** Have a comprehensive maintenance check done on any equipment you will be taking with you to ensure that it is

in full and proper working order. You may want to research the availability of wheelchair and medical equipment providers in the areas you plan to visit. Plan ahead for electrical devices, plug adapters, and voltage/transformer converters to make sure you can charge and use necessary equipment while abroad.

- **Carry written plans:** Carry with you your written itinerary and directions of where you wish to go. These can be shown to people who might be able to help you if you become lost. Another useful tool is a point-and-conversation guide. People with disabilities should plan to learn a few words in the local language in case of emergency, such as “help,” “stop,” and basic vocabulary to describe your disability.

#### QUICK TIP



***Be aware of your surroundings as you are out and about, and be wary of strangers who approach you offering currency exchange, hotels or guided tours.***

## Guard Against Pickpockets and Petty Theft

Any crowded place—particularly train and bus stations, subways, markets and other tourist areas—are happy hunting grounds for thieves. This is only to be expected in most developing countries, but it is precisely because it is so expected that it is also implemented by would-be thieves. Pickpockets are rampant all over the world, and it's usually more than one perpetrator. One person usually jostles you, drops something near you, or distracts you in some way, while the actual pickpocket grabs your wallet, your purse, or some other valuable. Many times the ruse involves a child or a woman with a child, one of whom falls or drops something, or otherwise seems to make a reasonable request of you. While you offer assistance, the woman (or her accomplice) picks your pocket.

Besides being wary of strangers, be sure to secure your personal items. Stow your wallet in an inaccessible place; use clothing with zipped pockets or buttons; stash cash in more than one place on your person; and consider having a dummy wallet, one that's empty or contains items you don't need anymore, such as old receipts, expired credit cards, and a few dollars that you can hand over if approached by a thief who demands your money. If you don't have a fake wallet, use good judgment; give the thief what he or she wants and don't take chances. Be sure to notice what he or she looks like, what he or she's wearing, if he or she has a particular accent or distinguishing characteristic so you can report it to the local police.

You'll also want to guard against theft of your valuables in your dorm, apartment or room. For detailed advice on keeping your personal items safe, check out Chapter 4.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I had my wallet stolen in Costa Rica because I made a big mistake. There, you pay to ride the bus in cash as you get on. One day, my friends were ahead of me in line to get on the bus when one of them discovered that she did not have enough money. When I saw that, I held my wallet up in the air to signal to her that I would pay for her (and to everyone else that this was my wallet and it had money in it). Of course, someone snatched the wallet from my hand and ran off. Needless to say, we didn't get to ride the bus that day and had to wait for her host father to pick us up.*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.

*One afternoon I came back to my dorm from class to find my laptop computer stolen from my desk. Because the two doors leading into my flat and personal room were both locked, it was extremely disconcerting to find that a place that I considered to be personal and safe was not—that someone could come into my locked room without my permission or knowledge. I told my RA, who then reported the incident to the building manager, my program director, and the local police. The program offered a number of services in terms of legal assistance and emotional support. While I never found my laptop, one year later police identified the thief as the building's maintenance worker.*

— Isabelle Feldhaus, University of Southern California. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in South Africa.

## DEALING WITH ROBBERY

If you discover that you've been the victim of a robbery, try to stay calm. Take stock of what was stolen and report any credit/ATM cards to the bank or issuing agent as soon as possible. Hopefully you will have made copies of the card numbers and phone numbers just in case, and perhaps you've even set up a system with a family member to do the alerting for you on the ground in the United States. If the robbery is serious, you'll need to file a police report. Doing so can be a real hassle, but you must do it if your passport has been stolen or if you plan on filing an insurance claim to recover the value of your stolen items. Reporting the theft to police and credit card companies quickly makes it less likely that creditors will hold you responsible for any fraudulent charges made on your stolen cards. If you don't speak the language well, find someone who does so that you can report what happened accurately and understand what you, as the victim, are supposed to do next. Once you have the police report in hand, make several copies. Call your banks again and offer them a copy of the report and inquire as to whether any charges or withdrawals were made on your accounts. Do all of this as expeditiously as possible, and always within a few days of the incident. Keep copies of all paperwork.

## LOST OR STOLEN PASSPORT

If your passport is lost or stolen, you must contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate as soon as possible. (You should have taken down the phone numbers for the U.S. embassy and/or consulate nearest your campus, and in those countries in which you'll be traveling. If not, find them quickly.) You will be directed to the American citizens services unit of the consular section, where someone will walk you through the steps that you will need to take. Be sure to tell them if you are scheduled to leave the country soon so that the normal replacement process can be expedited.

## Don't Break the Law

To keep from breaking the law, you need to know what the law is. Depending on your host country, you could be arrested for possessing prescription drugs; taking photographs of military or government buildings, representatives or activities; trying to buy an antique or take a historic artifact out of the country; taking part in political demonstrations; or driving without the proper license—just to name a few. As previously mentioned, you should have already informed yourself about any unusual or unexpected laws that your host country may have before you arrive. But don't just stop there, pay attention to practices once you're on the ground, read the newspaper, and ask friends and campus advisers any questions you may have.



### QUICK TIP

***In some countries, being found guilty of violating drug laws can result in incarceration and even the death penalty.***

By far the most legal trouble that Americans get into overseas comes from getting caught with illegal or controlled drugs. Drug laws vary from country to country, and many take illegal drug possession exceedingly seriously. Many countries have mandatory prison sentences or physical punishment, and a few even impose the death penalty. If you're caught with drugs in such a country, there's not much that anyone will be able to do for you.

Although the legal age for consuming alcohol is well below 21 in many countries, this doesn't give you carte blanche to get drunk and behave in disorderly ways. Just as in the United States, you can get arrested for this. But overseas—and especially in developing countries—it usually results in jail time and not just a fine. Excessive drinking can also endanger your personal safety, eroding your inhibitions and clouding your judgment. Be smart and go easy on the partying while overseas.

If you are arrested and a representative of your overseas university can't resolve the situation for you, you should expect a visit from a U.S. consular officer. He or she will advise you of what you can expect procedurally, provide a list of attorneys, and call your family to alert them to the situation. The officer can also help to ensure that local laws and internationally accepted standards are followed. This person is not your attorney, however, will not pay any fees, and cannot demand your release. If you are arrested, even under false pretenses, it's generally serious business.

## Emergencies

In the event of an adverse situation affecting U.S. citizens, the embassy will post notices on its website, broadcast information through local media channels, and contact Americans using any known email addresses or phone numbers, or via the STEP program if you've registered, as you should have. In the rare case that the situation is potentially life threatening, the embassy will advise all Americans to leave the country, and may possibly be able to offer some assistance to do so. If you are studying in or traveling to a country that is prone to natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions in Indonesia or floods in India, or places where political and social upheaval is commonplace, you should take extra precautions. Go to your local embassy's website and familiarize yourself with evacuation plans. In most cases, you or your program will need to arrange for commercial transportation. The U.S. consulate generally only arranges chartered transportation in extreme circumstances, and very rarely provides any kind of military evacuation. Depending on the urgency, you may or may not be able to bring all or most of your belongings. But you will always need to bring your passport to identify yourself as an American citizen.

## Medical Treatment

Medical practices vary widely in countries around the world, and it's important that you understand the healthcare system of your host country. You can always check in with the U.S. embassy to inquire about recommended doctors, clinics or hospitals. If you're given a prescription, be sure to use only reputable, major pharmacies; ask the embassy if you aren't sure. If you get sick or injured abroad, you

may actually receive better care than at home. If you choose to be evacuated out of the country, it will be very expensive.

If you have a preexisting medical condition, secure a letter from your doctor fully describing it and listing all prescription medications you take because of it. All medications should be left in their original containers and be clearly labeled, and you should check with the foreign embassy of your host country to make sure any required medications are not illegal.

If you become seriously ill or injured abroad, contact the U.S. embassy for assistance in locating medical services and informing family or friends. Note, however, that most countries require you to pay for such services up front, and frequently in cash. Make sure you know what your insurance covers.

Staying safe abroad can be done, and odds are you will have an incident-free time. Follow the practical tips we've provided here and, above all, use common sense.



## HOW CAN U.S. CONSULATES AND EMBASSIES HELP?

Although most problems can be solved with the help of campus advisers, medical experts, or the local police, sometimes you may need to get the U.S. embassy or consulate involved. Embassies are located in the capital, while consulates are located in other large cities throughout the country. The number of consulates varies depending on each country; there is no fixed number.

Consular officers can help in the following ways:

- **Replace a stolen passport**
- **Contact family, friends, or employers**
- **Obtain appropriate medical care**
- **Address emergency needs that arise as a result of the crime**
- **Explain the local criminal justice process**
- **Obtain official police information about your case**
- **Connect you to local and U.S. resources intended to assist victims of crime**
- **Obtain information about local and U.S. victim compensation programs**
- **Provide a list of local lawyers who speak English**

What consular officers do not do:

- **Investigate crimes**
- **Provide legal advice or represent you in court**
- **Serve as official interpreters or translators**
- **Pay any legal, medical or other fees for you**



# TOP TIPS

## Top 10 Tips for Staying Safe While Studying Abroad

1. *Take health and safety precautions before you leave the United States.*
2. *Familiarize yourself with local laws and don't break them.*
3. *Practice smart safety always; don't put yourself in dangerous situations.*
4. *Get to know your new neighborhoods and locate the necessities: banks, food stores, hospital, post office, laundry, internet café.*
5. *Stay healthy.*
6. *Use common sense.*
7. *Stay calm and make decisions carefully.*
8. *Stay informed about local news.*
9. *Guard against petty theft and pickpockets.*
10. *If something unfortunate does happen, seek professional guidance and assistance.*

CHAPTER 8

## Making the Most of Your Time Abroad

Odds are you're going to want to thrive during your study abroad experience, not just survive it. To that end, this chapter shares some basic strategies that are viable wherever you go and whatever your study abroad program. Over time, you will also discover strategies unique to you or your situation. Everyone comes back from their time abroad with a slightly different story as to how they made the most of their opportunity to grow emotionally, intellectually, and cross-culturally. Few of them say it was easy. But if you do it right, you'll have earned the stripes of that "minor in international living" that we mentioned in Chapter 1. You'll also be ahead of the pack when you start searching for a job after graduation.

### Hone Your Cross-Cultural Skills

In addition to being globally savvy, successful internationalists also have the soft skills required to succeed across cultures that employers now seek. These include flexibility, team building and listening. These skills are not unique to those with international experience, and studying abroad is not the same as professional experience. Still, you can hone these skills during your time on the ground, as well as once you've returned and are entering the workforce. Take note of your abilities in these areas and try to develop them; they'll make a positive difference in your study abroad experience and any future travels you may undertake. You can also refer to them to make an impression on potential employers after you've returned, whether you're applying for internships, interviewing for graduate school

or fellowships, or looking for a job after graduation. The following was taken from research conducted by Stacie Berdan with more than 200 successful internationalists and featured in the award-winning book, *Get Ahead By Going Abroad: A Woman's Guide to Fast-track Career Success*:

- **Adaptability and flexibility** count because in a foreign culture, you must be fluid. You must be able to work around situations and find alternative ways of doing things.
- **Excellent communication** matters a great deal because you must make yourself understood in another country where you may or may not be fluent in the language. Cultural clues and body language are tricky, and miscommunication is rampant.
- **The ability to build relationships** is important in a strange environment because you must be able to create social ties with new friends, traveling companions, and fellow students.
- **Patience and persistence** are important, because going with the flow is a good strategy when nothing else works. “Local time” and “local custom” mean different things in every country.
- **Intellectual curiosity** drives people like you to learn about the world—its history, geography, literature and economics. Knowledge, in turn, leads you to a better understanding of how to work across cultures. Global thinkers are curious about what makes the world go round.

To a certain degree, these traits are inherent. But they can also be learned. They will help you adjust and succeed while studying abroad. You should be honing all of these skills while abroad.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*Many things helped me integrate into the local Egyptian culture, but the most important of all was empathy. Only by understanding others' various socioeconomic classes, religions, political views and more could I begin to immerse myself in the culture.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

*I learned how to embrace change and difference more readily. During any study abroad experience, it's easy to adopt an "us vs. them" mentality as a coping and bonding mechanism to your new environment ("us"—the American students; "them"—everyone else). For one, you cope with the different environment and being away from home, and secondly, you bond with fellow Americans by distinguishing your own background from the culture of the host country. Although it seems to be common practice, I'd discourage this. Once you're studying in a foreign country, you should make it a goal to have as many foreign (if not more) friends as American friends. It's okay to feel uncomfortable or out of place—that means you're pushing your own boundaries.*

— Leah Goodridge, Vassar College. Studied abroad in England.

*Every time I took a taxi in Morocco the driver would ask where I was from and when I said from the United States the next question the driver would ask would be "Do you know the first country to recognize the United States?" And I would pretend that I did not know, even though the previous day a different taxi driver had told me the answer, and sure enough I would hear all about how Morocco had been the first country to recognize the United States. It was these kinds of conversations that then turned into more interesting ones about Morocco and Moroccans' perceptions of the United States. Often times, I was the first person that they had met from the United States who knew Arabic, but more importantly, I was perhaps the first person who had taken the time to hear their perspective and try to understand their point of view.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

## Learn from Your Mistakes

Cultural mistakes and blunders—even humiliating ones—are inevitable. The important thing is to learn from your mistakes to prevent them from happening again. For this, it will help not to take yourself too seriously. It's okay to occasionally make a fool of yourself and have everyone laugh at you. If you can also laugh at yourself, you'll be much better off. In addition, laughter can be a great ice breaker, and may help in meeting new people.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Europeans don't talk as loudly as Americans. Friends and I were on a train heading to Norwich, England, and we were just conversing when we realized that a whole group of people sitting next to us were staring at us. We thought about why that might be, and when we stopped talking, the train was completely silent. We actually had to watch how loud we were talking throughout the trip because we were usually the loudest everywhere we went!*

— Ashley Gaona, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in England.

*I think many cultural mistakes can be avoided just simply by asking.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*I am sure I came across as quite socially awkward in the beginning of my stay, simply because I was raised with so much more of a sense of personal space than the average Costa Rican. I remember one time in particular when I ran into a Costa Rican student from one of my classes while walking around campus. It was only a couple of weeks into the semester, but I knew him enough to at least wave hello. He, however, stopped me and kissed me on the cheek, which I found very strange, and I hope that didn't show (although I think it did). It turned out all right in the end though, as we later became good friends and were able to laugh about it.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

## Don't Blame the Locals for Your Problems

Hopefully, no one forced you to study abroad. You made the decision yourself. You also chose your destination, so if it's not everything you hoped—or if it's different in ways you never expected (and don't like)—don't blame your host country, which, after all, has been this way all along. You'll make much more progress—and save yourself a whole lot of angst—if you accept it for both its beauty and its flaws and find ways to make it work for you. For example, if you keep encountering bathrooms with no toilet tissue, start carrying some with you. If the bus is perpetually making you late for class, take an earlier one.

And remember, just because things aren't the same as they are back home doesn't mean they're inherently wrong or bad. Moreover, you're not going to get anywhere with the locals by complaining about how inferior their practices are to the way it's done back in the States. Diplomacy is key. People want you to accept and feel passionately about your new home. If you have questions, be sure to ask them out of curiosity and not arrogant superiority. Most people are willing to answer and to teach you, but not if you have made them feel embarrassed or humiliated.

**QUICK TIP**

***The American way is not the only way or even the best way—it's just one way.***

**FROM A STUDENT**

*I was out with friends and decided to meet with a different group of people across town around midnight. I walked a couple kilometers uphill until reaching what I thought was the discoteca where my friends were. The bouncer asked for ten euros to enter, and I then bought a bottle of locally brewed beer (a small one, at that) for what seemed like an inflated price. After a moment I realized the back hallway did not lead to the dance area, but rather that it was a cave with a dead end. Realizing I had been tricked into paying a cover for a coverless bar (and not the discoteca I had pursued) I went to the back room and started chatting with patrons. Most were college students interested in my nationality, and upon sharing that I was an American the bar erupted in chants of "Obama, Obama" and "U-S-A," presumably expressing excitement from the recent presidential inauguration. Perhaps it was because of the timing of my trip, but moments like these, where being an American was both a nuisance and a blessing while in a sea of strangers, were not uncommon while I studied in Europe.*

— Peter D.A. Wood, Oklahoma State University. Studied abroad in Spain.

## Plan Your Time

You only have a limited amount of time in your new country, and odds are that it will go by quickly. So manage your time instead of letting it manage you. Naturally, your primary objective is to successfully complete your coursework so as to earn those academic credits. Since few students do study abroad in their freshman year, odds are you are an experienced student with several semesters already under your belt, and have had some experience in doing this. But conditions will be different overseas, some significantly different, such as the lack of a large, central library where you can go to work and study every evening. So make sure that you create an environment in which you can do whatever it is that you will need to.

Next, remind yourself of your study abroad objective, and make a list of the things you need to do in order to meet that goal. The last thing you want to do is to find yourself on your way back to the airport disappointed with yourself for having come up short.

For example, if mastering the language is your top priority, get started right away with the tips listed below. If it's seeing as much of your host country as possible, start planning out those excursions now. An overall list of "to dos" affixed to your bedroom wall coupled with a day-to-day to do list will help you stay organized and on schedule.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*I wish I spent more time with my host family. I was so caught up in going somewhere new every weekend throughout my short stay in Costa Rica that I never gave myself enough time to really learn about them as people and representatives of their nation and culture. In hindsight, I wish I had thought to remember that I could always vacation in Costa Rica again years down the road, but my host family was the real once-in-a-lifetime experience.*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.



## Adapt to Prevailing Norms

Succeeding abroad depends largely on your ability to effectively adapt your behavior to the local culture. (The culture, after all, certainly isn't going to change for you.) Some aspects of any culture, such as etiquette, protocol and deportment, are fundamental and fairly easy to grasp. Being cognizant of them will help you master interpersonal dynamics such as greetings, dress, gift giving, punctuality, body language and table manners. Lying below the surface, however, are more subtle aspects, such as whether a culture is focused on the individual or the collective, the nature and importance of relationships, the role of time, how personal space is viewed, and the role of authority and hierarchy. Without meaning to—and without even knowing it in many cases—you may find yourself inadvertently violating one or more of these more subtle norms. And while the consequences probably won't be catastrophic, neither will they be beneficial.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*Most people don't have a real idea of what our lives are like on a normal day and are fascinated by simple things—like having to find a way to pay for college instead of going for free. I also found the mundane things in their lives interesting because they were completely foreign to me.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*The real learning in Morocco took place outside of the classroom. Being immersed in the local life enabled me to develop a much fuller and meaningful perspective on the various issues facing Morocco.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

*Although I've always been an early riser and am used to starting my day at 5 or 5:30 a.m., I changed my sleeping schedule during the winter in Finland. It was just so painful to get up 5 hours before the sun. So I'd work until 3 a.m., then go to bed and wake up at 11 a.m. with the "sun"—or at least with the growing reflection of the snow. You have to get used to pep talking yourself every day. And start drinking coffee. Lots of it.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

The single best way to prepare yourself for the inevitable differences is to go through specific cross-cultural training. If you aren't able to, though, read culture shock books or the culture sections of travel books before you arrive. Once you get comfortable on the ground, pay attention and ask if you have questions, preferably of someone who is familiar with both the American and local cultures. An ounce of preventive embarrassment could save you pounds of mortification. For more on culture and cross-cultural training see Chapter 6.

### **PAY ATTENTION**

Taking classes and reading ahead so you arrive knowing something about cultural differences in advance will certainly help you anticipate them. But it won't guarantee that you will recognize all of them once you arrive. You will still need to pay close attention if you are going to figure out exactly how things are done in your new environment. And don't rely solely upon your own powers of observation and analysis. If something happens that seems strange or contradictory to you, ask someone to explain it to you, preferably a local friend or veteran expatriate.

In case you remain unsure about a situation, remember the following:

- Most locals will understand that there is a cultural learning curve.
- Some misunderstandings are likely to result in humorous situations that may even help break the ice.
- A cultural faux-pas that seems distressing in the moment may seem like an important turning point in your understanding of the culture later on.

## Learn the Language

If you're going to a country where English is not the first language, you are lucky! You will have the opportunity to either practice a language you've already been learning, or start from scratch. If you have the proficiency to do so, take your courses in the local language. This way you can practice in an academic environment and be corrected by knowledgeable professors or fellow students. The same is true if you opt to take academic courses in English, but study language at the university. You will be learning in a structured, academic environment that will enhance your ability to practice on the street, in shops, with friends and/or with your local family.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*Because much of the population in the Western Cape region speaks Afrikaans, I studied this language and incorporated it into my project. My study of Afrikaans involved taking a course that provided a comprehensive overview of the language and enlisting the help of tutors and faculty members from the University of Western Cape. With the help of native speakers, I created an Afrikaans version of my data collection instrument and incorporated it into my study.*

— Darigg C. Brown, Pennsylvania State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in South Africa.

*Due to my learning disability, I thought I was sure to have problems memorizing, reading and interacting in Spanish. Much to my surprise, I learned much quicker than my peers and realized that I truly am a visual learner. In all honesty, I do not know if I ever would have learned Spanish if I had not gone overseas. Somehow, I found the courage to apply for the exchange program, and as a result of that, I now understand another way of living and being a better and stronger human being.*

— Kristin Hoobler Morgan, San Francisco State University. Studied abroad in Spain.

*I had taken Arabic courses and had learned about economics and the Middle East and North Africa. The Boren Fellowship allowed me to take my Arabic language skills from an intermediate to an advanced proficiency level and to also experience North Africa firsthand in a turbulent period in its history.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

But what if you won't be taking any structured language lessons? Should you still try to learn the language and, if so, how? The answer to the first question is an unequivocal "yes." Regardless of the goals of your study abroad program, trying to speak the local language enhances your cross-cultural integration and makes the experience much more interesting. Moreover, you'll have easy access to native speakers with whom you can converse, and ample opportunity to improve your listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

But convenience itself isn't going to do the trick. Without sufficient motivation and a structured approach, you may not learn much, and what you do learn might be inaccurate, especially in terms of grammar and pronunciation. It's important to determine exactly what your language-learning objectives are. Do you want to use your study abroad experience to improve your proficiency, perhaps with the goal of being able to list proficiency in the language on your résumé? Or do you simply want to be able to "function," i.e., ask for directions, order off a menu, communicate with your friends, and better understand the culture?

If your goal is a higher level of proficiency, you will definitely need to have a structured approach so that you can practice daily and have assistance in improving the accuracy of your communications.

## Language Strategies

- **Take a local language class.** If you can't take a class on campus due to scheduling conflicts or possibly because of its price, ask a professor or friend to recommend a class off campus. There are usually plenty to be found in major cities or near universities.
- **Join a language club.** Informal groups, most of which are absolutely free, meet in parks, community centers, and faith-based facilities.
- **Use language-learning self-study books, software, and apps.** Many people have used the likes of Berlitz, Rosetta Stone, and Praxis Language to increase their knowledge of a foreign language.

- **Enlist a private tutor.** One-on-one tutoring can be expensive, but amazingly effective. And sometimes, it can come free—in exchange for one-on-one tutoring in English. Check out bulletin boards, real and virtual, to find potential language study-buddies. Just be careful about safety, as in all situations when meeting strangers.

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*I arrived with no knowledge of Egyptian Arabic, yet after five months my knowledge increased by the day to about intermediate level. Every day was a lesson, especially when everything was new. It was challenging to learn to pronounce names and places, but exposure is the best learning tool, not only for language but to become more globally aware.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

*I found a language partner, or two or three or four. It took a little bit of courage, but I'd just ask somebody who looked friendly if they wanted to be my language partner. Whether it was on my college campus, in a coffee shop, or just on the subway, I took a chance and asked. The worst that could happen was that they would say no. I ended up meeting a number of people who were hoping to study in the U.S., and even more who wanted to teach Chinese in the U.S. and were delighted for me to be their first student.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.

*I found that the people who I interacted with in Paris were less concerned with the exact grammar of my French, but more with the pronunciation of the language. People really respected the fact that I was trying to improve my accent.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.

## Learn, Practice, and Keep it Up

### Before you leave the United States, familiarize yourself with the language.

- Buy a reputable dual-language traveling dictionary or app.
- Check out Live Mocha, Hello-Hello, and other similar free online language learning tools to get a feel for the language; download the travel app and sign up for the daily texts and emails.
- Try to listen to the language on the radio, television, or online to get your ear accustomed to its sounds and intonations.
- Find written examples of the language online or in the library to get a sense of what it looks like.
- Learn how to say a few simple greetings and phrases. Something as simple as “I do not speak [language], but I want to learn” can open doors.

### Once you're on the ground:

- Start paying attention to signs, forms and conversation.
- Begin utilizing your simple phrases.
- Make a list of a few new phrases and words you want to learn, and practice them until they come naturally to you.
- Strike up conversations with locals and practice what you have learned so far.
- Listen to local radio stations. You'll only understand a fraction of what they are saying, but before too long you'll start to be able to pick out a few words and phrases. In the meantime, you'll become even more familiar with pronunciation and intonation.
- Listen to songs in the local language.
- Watch television or go to movies with subtitles.
- Read newspaper headlines and leads, signs and ads—things with short, terse messages that you either catch or know that you haven't.

- Be on the lookout for those items where you can anticipate what is being written, such as food labels, product instructions, and public notices.
- Take your dictionary or app with you and look up words and phrases (but don't be too public about it).
- Ask people how to say something if you're in a store, on the bus, or on campus.
- Find friends who are at more or less the same language level as you, and share your weekly learning with them.
- Check out children's books, including those whose story lines you already know.
- Speak with small children, especially those whose language level is low and who won't make fun of you when you make a mistake.
- Practice!

**Once you return to the United States:**

- Keep it up online, with friends, or via Skype with your friends abroad.
- Seek out higher level classes at your university. If they don't offer them, see if you can do advanced independent study.

**FROM A STUDENT**

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*I speak French very well, but I would never admit it. Being forced to use my French (successfully) in certain situations made me more comfortable using it when it wasn't necessary because I knew I was competent enough. My confidence overall increased significantly.*

— Amy Newman, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in France.

## FROM AN EDUCATOR

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*The biggest challenge with learning on the ground is allowing yourself to take risks and jump right in. You don't need to understand every single word someone is saying—just be patient and every week you will understand more. Realize, too, that native speakers are generally very patient, so just keep trying and don't revert to English just because they happen to speak it.*

— Marty Abbott, executive director of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

People can be very friendly to those trying to learn their language, but they may not make the effort to correct you. Or their explanations of why you say something this way may be misleading or erroneous. Or since they don't speak English, they may misinterpret what it is that you want them to tell you. The greatest barrier to learning a language is overcoming your own fear of making embarrassing mistakes in public.

As your confidence in your language skills grows, you will feel more comfortable spending time doing everyday things such as attending cultural events, going to movies or concerts, or just following the local customs—ordering special items not necessarily on the menu or getting a coffee in the local café.



## FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

According to the National Survey on Student Engagement 2010 online survey of first and senior year post-secondary students in the United States, about one-quarter of senior college students with disabilities who have taken a foreign language course have also studied abroad.

- Look for a course structure and instructors with an approach that fits you.
- With the class instructor, interpreter or note-taker, discuss your goals for the class, how you plan to access the lessons, and what would be helpful for you.
- Don't wait too long to approach the class instructor or disability provider if the access solutions aren't working.
- Do your part, if needed, in acquiring non-English audio or Braille materials and learning the necessary technology or Braille code to access the foreign language lessons.
- The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) provides non-English audio and Braille materials produced and offered by NLS, by NLS cooperating libraries, and by other organizations, foreign and domestic.
- Find sign language dictionaries from the country you are interested in going to if you also want to learn the language of the deaf community.

For more information, look up the “A World Awaits You, Accessing Foreign Languages” or “Foreign Language Learning and Students with Disabilities” tip sheets from MIUSA.

## LANGUAGE LEARNING TIPS

- **Invest the time.** The more time you spend engaged with the language, the faster you will learn. But be patient: many studies show learners need as many as 50 exposures to a new word in every form (reading, writing, speaking, listening) before it sticks.
- **Focus on “communicative competence.”** Don’t just memorize words and set practical phrases. Language communicates, so communicate! Go to restaurants and order off the menu, chat with people you meet on the bus, make inquiries in shops. Let yourself be overwhelmed, then figure it out!
- **Take the initiative.** No one can make you learn another language. You have to want to do it. It helps, therefore, to start with or focus on those words and phrases that interest you or pertain to an outside interest that you already have, such as a particular sport, hobby, or intellectual pursuit. Set your own goals and work to achieve them.
- **Combine speaking and writing at the same time.** Oral language skills and literacy are interdependent. Speaking helps you discover the proper usage of the words you encounter in print. Print, in turn, exposes you to far more language than you can encounter in social interactions.
- **Enjoy it!**

## Get to Know People

Living by yourself in another country can be exceedingly lonely, even when you’re surrounded by people. Not knowing anyone is tough enough, but if you can’t even strike up a basic conversation with them, you can soon feel truly isolated. Unless you are lucky enough to have extroverted contacts or neighbors, it will be up to you to do the reaching out. If you’re like most people, you’ll feel anxious about striking up a conversation in a second language with casual acquaintances. But you simply must get to know people, preferably people who have similar interests.

You'll need them to help you understand tricky cultural situations and deal with any complicated and unforeseen problems that may arise, such as a plumbing problem in your apartment or the best pharmacy to get over-the-counter medicine you may need. You'll also just want to hang out with them.



### ***Americans who take the trouble to learn another language really stand out!***

#### FROM A STUDENT

*I had some encounters with British people who I felt were rude, and so I wasn't very fond of them until I snuck up on them at the pub. Here, they're some of the friendliest people I've ever met. They love to talk and will do so on almost any topic you throw their way. It took me a while to reconcile the two personalities that make up the people of England, but once I did I quite liked them and found that their way of interacting is no better or worse than our own.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*Sports generate shared experiences, something to talk about and celebrate together and help to overcome language barriers like nothing else. While playing team sports you hear so much cheering and talking—and lots of words repeated—so you actually pick up the new language faster than you'd expect. When possible, I like to try group classes like aerobics, yoga or Pilates, where I can listen and watch the instructor's movements.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

Finding people from your own or a similar culture is usually easy enough. In fact, you'll be astonished at how quickly you open up to someone you encounter completely by chance if they happen to speak English, even if that English is spoken with a Scottish, Indian, or even Zambian accent. At least you've got language

in common, and these people will generally be happy to help you get settled in, show you around, and answer basic “how to” questions. But don’t limit yourself to just those people, as easy as they are to relate to. One of the best things about studying abroad is meeting people from radically different backgrounds and cultures. Perhaps there are certain sports you play or music you like. Find a conversation partner if you want to speak the local language—or even just to help locals practice their English skills. You’d be surprised how many interesting people there are in the world.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*The key to making new friends is to break out of your comfort zone and embrace the awkwardness that might stem from getting to know someone who is different from you.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year in Argentina. Studied abroad in Spain.

*Leave the Americans behind. When I was with my American classmates, I would not speak Spanish. In order to change this, I had to break away and explore the people and their way of life. Allow yourself to be a part of the culture to give yourself a holistic experience. Don’t be afraid to explore the country (churches, museums, grocery stores, shopping centers, restaurants, entertainment venues, fitness centers, parks, etc.); there is so much more than partying.*

— Crescendo Smalls, Wagner College. Studied abroad in Spain.

*One of the most interesting people that I met during my time in Morocco was a guy named Jaloul. I lived in an apartment near a supermarket one block away. Jaloul was a parking attendant responsible for the block between my apartment and the supermarket and had been working that job for more than 20 years in the same spot. He knew everyone, and he knew that I was new in the neighborhood. He had so many interesting stories! Whenever I had a question about Moroccan culture he always had a brilliant answer. Sometimes, when I would hear someone from the elite Moroccan society say something about some issue, I would ask for Jaloul’s opinion, and he always had a better one. Whether the topic was Moroccan politics, religion, the economy, culture or marriage, it was fascinating to hear the diverse perspectives even within Morocco.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*That deaf connection—being able to communicate with deaf people internationally—is special. Learning how to sign in their language was so much easier than learning how to speak or lip-read their languages. We all “get it”: we get the oppression, the frustrating upbringing, feeling like we’re in the minority. That experience gave me a thirst for connecting with deaf people internationally.*

— Christy Smith, who is deaf, National Technical Institute for the Deaf.  
Studied abroad in India, Costa Rica.

## Friendships Without Borders

As you meet people and make new friends, you may have a sense of a temporary relationship, wondering if you’ll keep in touch. Hopefully you will, because the friends you make, whether they’re fellow Americans abroad, other international students or local students, are an important part of your overall experience in the new culture. You will learn from each other, have formative experiences together, and form bonds that are some of the strongest you’ve made. International experiences tend to bind people together much faster and much more closely because of the intensity of the experience. When your time is coming to an end, be sure you have contact information that is more permanent than a school email address or post office box. You’ll want to be able to reach out years down the road, and it’s so sad to lose touch with a friend. And although social media has made it easier to find people, it’s not as easy on a global scale. Be sure to say your goodbyes properly and slowly; a sudden break can be quite traumatic, and it may be difficult to repair the emotional damage after you’ve left.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*When I met up with new friends, I felt that they took more time to really get to know me. People seemed to invest in personal relationships in a way I never really experienced. For example, after a meal, people remained seated at the table for the sobremesa, an expected time to chat and connect. This is what I miss most about Buenos Aires.*

— Kim Gordon, University of Pennsylvania. Studied abroad in Argentina.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Meet people! Be really overly friendly, even if you feel awkward. I am so glad I put myself out there to the other students, and I think I had a much less sheltered experience than some of the other American exchange students because of it.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

*It was very hard to make friends given the circumstances. There was a student in my program who had a diverse background, and she was friendly to me. The other students were not. They seemed to take on the attitude that others had toward me, mostly negative because of my skin color. I found this to be strange. Fortunately, I lived in a house with three French, one Ugandan, one Chinese, and one Austrian. We all became friends and we would often share meals, play games, and shop together. I still keep in touch with them today.*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.

## Limit Your Use of Distracting Technology

In order to truly experience another culture, experts recommend complete immersion—language, living arrangements, food, activities and more. And while you may not feel comfortable with the so-called “deep dive,” neither should you just sit passively on the edge of the pool.

In other words, don’t remain overly connected to home. Yes, you’ll probably be a little homesick and need to call or Skype with your parents and friends. But most new overseas arrivals find that they acclimate faster if they severely limit their contact with their family or friends back on their home campus. The more time you spend interacting with them, the less time you have to spend interacting with those in your new home, the unfortunate result of which is that you will actually end up feeling even more homesick and more lonely.

Unfortunately, current communication technologies, most of which are essentially free, allow you to stay connected to home almost as much as you want. This is

not always good, and you should avoid daily use of social media and phone calls. Sure, you may need your Facebook account to catch up with your local friends, but just check it—and that's it.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I used as little technology as I could while abroad, because I believe it can hinder a person from being able to live in the moment and truly experience what is around them. I had a basic cell phone that I bought while in Turkey to communicate with my friends there if we had plans to meet up someplace. I used email mostly to keep in touch with friends and family back home. I used Skype to connect with my family when I missed seeing their faces, and also to communicate with my other friends studying abroad whenever we needed to vent about our experiences.*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.

Another aspect of technology that impedes growth is music and movies. Sure, it's okay to bring some playlists and maybe a movie or two that makes you laugh or comforts you. But you should really try to refrain from bringing your entire music library of thousands of songs and dozens of movies. If these are too easily available, you're much more likely to be tempted to spend your precious time (especially in the beginning) listening and watching these as opposed to forcing yourself to make new friends, because they are easier and make you feel better. While some will argue that these comforts from home soothe your anxiety and help you settle in better, we respectfully disagree. We believe that the experience of being disconnected, isolated, lonely, and, yes, even temporarily overwhelmed are an important part of your experience that will ultimately lead to personal growth. Adapting to this situation—and you will, because you have to—is what stimulates the treasure trove of transformation, as evidenced by increased tolerance, empathy, perseverance, independence and gratitude.

In short, you chose to study abroad, so study abroad. Leave all but the most essential technological trappings of 21st century American life behind. Find new cultural experiences to play over in your mind and share with friends instead.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I don't travel halfway around the world to talk to my American friends on Facebook, and I don't need a GPS to find my way around Rome. I prefer to wander around the city for as long as it takes so I can find more interesting restaurants, shops and people this way. Plus, it's just more fun when your path isn't predefined by an electronic device. I don't like cell phones either. Not on international trips. If you need to phone home, there are pay phones everywhere. Cell phones are just another distraction. Take the temptation out of your hands; don't bring it.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*I bought my parents a webcam in preparation for my time abroad, assuming Skype would be the best and cheapest way to communicate. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon how you look at it), the Internet was very unreliable where I was living and making a successful Skype connection was about as rare as winning the lottery. On one hand, it made it very difficult for me to keep in touch with my family. On the other hand, it kept me from spending any significant amount of time on my computer when I could have been embracing my time in Paris otherwise.*

— Amy Newman, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in France.

## Explore Your New Home

Studying abroad invariably brings with it the opportunity to explore a new environment. So be a tourist, whether just in the confines of your host city, country or beyond. There is so much to see and so little time, so take advantage of any opportunities that present themselves, especially at the beginning of your stay when you will probably have more free time and your learning curve will be steepest. Here are some tips on how to do it.

## Try Something New Every Few Days

Make it a point to step outside of your comfort zone every few days. For example, try a new restaurant, check out a store you have just walked past before, or visit a



neighborhood on the other side of town. These little twists of newness add to your routine of classes and studying, and provide an interesting mix to your days—and, many times, rewarding encounters.

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*Keep an open mind. Try things you wouldn't have tried back home or engage with people with whom you would not likely have engaged back home. You can learn a lot about yourself. I learned that I wasn't at all a shy person. I also discovered new foods that I liked!*

— Taurean Barnwell, University of South Florida. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Japan.

*Live like the natives, eat with the natives, and socialize with the natives. It amazed me to see other American students only socializing with other American students. In some cases, I witnessed Americans only eating in a Moroccan McDonald's. Some students treated their abroad experience like a vacation. In some ways, it is. I traveled almost every weekend and visited nine other countries. But I traveled with Moroccans at the same time. It is so important to truly relax and live in the nation you are studying in. It makes you appreciate other cultures and, by the same token, makes you appreciate your American ways.*

— Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.

*Coming from a very "Desperate Housewives-esque" town, I tried to learn everything I could about diversity. By truly immersing myself in different cultures, I learned a lot about myself, as well as the world around me, and that is one thing I would never trade.*

— Gregory Chocheles, Bryant University. Studied abroad in Spain.

## Find Things That Interest You

Whether you're a sports fanatic, culture buff, or have a particular intellectual interest, seek out those activities or events that you enjoy. You'll find they may be different—playing soccer instead of basketball, experiencing indigenous art by people you've never heard of instead of the masters—but you'll come away with

a broadened perspective. Invariably, you'll also meet people who share your interests and with whom you can strike up a friendship.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I spent two semesters studying at Moscow State University (MSU), where I took courses in Russian grammar, phonetics, literature, history, politics, business, mass media and culture. At MSU, I had the opportunity to work with the International Union, a student organization focused on bringing together those interested in foreign cultures and languages. I also competed in the university league of KVN, a Russian comedy game show, where my team made it to the semifinals! I had the chance to do many things, from being in a commercial to teaching English!*

— **Cody White, West Virginia University.** Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Russia. Awarded Gilman Scholarship to study in Oman.

*Be courageous and take a step out of your comfort zone. It can be awkward; it can be scary. But it is worth it. My friend Shelby and I heard that there was a church youth group in Vladimir, and we decided to visit one night and try to connect with students there. When we first introduced ourselves, we were nervous and unsure of what their reaction would be to a random pair of American girls joining their meeting. But to our delight, the students at the youth group welcomed us with open arms, befriending us and inviting us into their world. If Shelby and I had not taken that first step to ring the church doorbell, we would have forfeited some great relationships.*

— **Hope Johnson, Gordon College.** Studied abroad in Russia.

## Don't Forget to See the Sights

In addition to studying and meeting new people, you should take the time to see the local sights, whatever they might be. Whether it's checking out the Forbidden City in the heart of Beijing, exploring the Monteverde Cloud Forest in Costa Rica, or trying to visit all the museums in Paris, explore your new home. You may not have a chance like this again anytime soon. If you don't want to act too much like a tourist, you can ask a local friend or host family member to join you—it can give you new perspectives to see the sights through the eyes of a resident.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*While my friends at home had their noses buried in books, I was fortunate enough to be experiencing the world, something very few people get to do in a lifetime, never mind at age 21. It was during this moment, my “aha moment,” that I realized that all of the preparation I had done before I left, the homesickness I had occasionally experienced, and the financial sacrifices I had made to go abroad were all worth it.*

— Nate Nault, College of the Holy Cross. Studied abroad in Scotland.  
Spending postgraduate gap year in China.

*I found the Costa Rican travel services to be far more reliable than anything I’ve ever encountered in the U.S. Always carry cash though—you need to find that perfect amount between enough to get you out of a tight spot and not enough to make you a target. I usually carried the Costa Rican equivalent of US\$30.*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

## Relax and Enjoy!

Don’t be so focused on seeing everything that you start feeling like you’re on a forced march. Challenge yourself to see the new, but make sure you see things at a pace that lets you appreciate them, even if not every experience is 100% enjoyable.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Do as much as possible but be sure to soak it all in. Sometimes just stopping to stare is worth more than running off to the next monument, building or mountain. I’m also a big fan of taking a lazy day. It never fails that at some point in my trips I just feel the need to do nothing for a day. Maybe lounge around the hotel I’m staying at, or maybe a stroll through one of the city parks. I find these days to be some of the most rewarding of my travels, because they often result in unexpected conversations with locals, and they ensure that I’m fully charged for my next adventure out into the city.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

## Travel

In addition to shorter explorations of your new city and outlying areas, you should also consider taking far-ranging excursions, assuming that you have both the time and the means to do so. You may choose, for example, to participate in the weekend excursions that are offered in conjunction with your academic program. Or you may decide to travel independently whenever the opportunity presents itself. Or, quite possibly, you may decide to stay on for a few weeks or even months after the academic program is over so you can explore your country or region in much greater depth. Whichever option works for you, go for it. No matter where you go and for how long, your understanding and appreciation of the people and culture will be expanded and your overall experience will be enriched. You'll also learn a lot about yourself and the big, wide world around you.

While travel and tourism are often valuable, they should not overshadow the actual purpose of studying abroad, which is, of course, studying, as well as living in another culture. We advise that you leave some time for travel, but also leave ample time to explore your host community and spend downtime with fellow students, rather than leaving town every weekend.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*At the beginning of the semester, I went with a service group to La Pampa, Argentina, eight hours from the capital of Buenos Aires. We worked on furnishing the homes of two underprivileged families for a long weekend. It was an amazing opportunity to meet warm, helpful Argentines and to experience a bit of the culture in a different region of Argentina.*

— Kim Gordon, University of Pennsylvania. Studied abroad in Argentina.

*All three of my study abroad trips took place during the school year. One of the tricks we learned was to take extra time after our projects to travel around the area. I was in areas of the world I had not been before, and the extra time provided me with incredible memories. From backpacking down the Moroccan coast to scuba diving in Malaysia, these were experiences that I will always remember.*

— Garrett Langdon, George Washington University. Studied abroad in Egypt, Sweden, Singapore.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I went on a weeklong expedition across Morocco, but didn't tell my parents until after I had come back. Growing up so close to NYC, my parents had been scarred by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. I had heard many things about Arab nations through my family, friends and the media, but I felt had to see it for myself. Looking back on that week spent in such a far-off corner of the world, I don't regret a single moment. The people were incredibly friendly and open to Americans. The landscape was absolutely breathtaking, and, despite one case of food poisoning, the food was delicious. I encountered a strong outreach from people that I've always been taught to associate with fear, and for me that was the greatest example of cultural exposure that I had whilst abroad.*

— Gregory Chocheles, Bryant University. Studied abroad in Spain.

Hostels can be a reliable choice for travelers on a budget, particularly those that are members of the Hosteling International, which has a system of assured standards, or registered with tourist bureaus and evaluated by trustworthy guidebooks. Private hostels can be uneven in quality, so make sure the one you are considering has both a good reputation—the best recommendations are the ones from recent guests—and good security. The front door should lock, your room should lock, and you might even want a locker for your stuff. If not, perhaps there's a safe in the office where you can leave important documents. In any case, don't leave valuables in the room, and avoid rooms on the first floor so as to minimize access from the street. When you leave the hostel to explore, take a card with the hostel's name and address or write it down. Keep it in a safe place.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*I found it really helpful to plan all of my trips in the beginning of the semester. That way you know how much money you have left for everyday activities. The prices of flights and hostels also increase dramatically as your departure date approaches. Additionally, it is easier to budget time to complete schoolwork if you have an idea of when you will be away.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Hostelworld.com and Airbnb.com were two of my best friends while traveling during my semester abroad. Look at the reviews before you book, but don't be turned off by a few bad reviews because every traveler has different expectations.*

— Amy Newman, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in France.

**SAFETY WHILE TRAVELING**

If and when you travel, follow many of the same smart safety rules listed in Chapter 7, as well as these tips:

- Do your research on the place you're visiting.
- Ask friends and fellow travelers for tips specific to the trip that you are about to take.
- Buy or borrow an up-to-date guidebook, and check out online sites and updates.
- Get a map or at least check the place out online.
- Find out about public transportation.
- Register with STEP if you're leaving your host country.
- Make reservations only through the transportation provider, licensed travel agencies, and reputable hostels and hotels.
- Create an itinerary with dates, addresses and contact information to share with friends and family.
- Travel with friends whenever possible. If you can't, make friends or at least acquaintances en route so as to give the impression that you aren't traveling alone.
- Travel as lightly as possible.
- Bring only those valuables that you will need, and be careful where you show them.

## Work or Intern While Abroad

Working or interning while you're studying abroad has two distinct benefits. First, if you are indeed working, you can earn some extra cash, which will always come in handy. (Never count on working abroad to pay for your studies. It might not happen and then you could be in a world of trouble.)

The other is the local cultural and economic insights that you will inevitably gain, even if you're only stacking books at a library, selling tickets at a movie theater, or doing basic administrative tasks at an office. Whether you can work or intern depends on the rules of the country and the terms of your visa, and every country is different. The only way to know for sure is to check with your country's immigration authorities—don't just rely upon word of mouth. Some student visas, for example, allow work for up to a certain number of hours per week, but only under certain conditions. If you are allowed to work, see if there is a list of job openings posted somewhere on campus. Make sure that any work you undertake does not infringe on your studies, which are still your main priority. Likewise for internships.

### QUICK TIP



***An internship abroad can be a great résumé booster.***

One of the most common work opportunities available to Americans studying overseas is teaching English to locals. And in many countries, you won't even need a work permit, but you might need a certificate, so check into it. Teaching English, however, is not just a matter of having someone write or speak to you and then correcting all their mistakes. You must know the underlying grammatical rules and be able to explain them cogently. Before you decide to don your professorial cap, you will need to ask around for others' opinions on the pros and cons of teaching. You might love it or hate it, depending on your personality.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Fortunately, my study abroad program encouraged and facilitated students getting volunteer positions. The volunteer schedules were very accommodating and flexible, as supervisors were very understanding of students' schedules. This made volunteering fun, manageable, and a valuable component of my study abroad experience.*

— Isabelle Feldhaus, University of Southern California. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in South Africa.

*As part of Northeastern's international business program, I studied at ICADE in Madrid for seven months, followed by an internship that I had to apply for in-country. At the time, the economy in Spain was in bad shape. It took roughly 35 applications and six months for me to land a job, not uncommon among my fellow classmates. Although it was extremely difficult to be unemployed while some of my friends had begun to work, I couldn't lose confidence in myself. If you plan to work abroad, you must remain confident during the process no matter how difficult it may be.*

— Daniel Schlemovitz, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in Spain.

*I sought to improve my language skills outside of the classroom. I befriended Turkish students at the university and joined different clubs. I even found an internship with a local English-language newspaper. Even though the newspaper was published in English, everyone spoke Turkish in the office, and I was able to improve both my listening and speaking skills. My internship exposed me to the daily political, economic and social issues happening in and around Turkey, and it was a great way to stay informed.*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.

## Interning Without Studying

There's always the option to travel abroad solely for the sake of an internship. As there is often no tuition to be paid, it costs far less than studying abroad, and you have the opportunity to gain real-life work experience without also having to accommodate a potentially demanding academic schedule, especially since your internship is likely to occupy prime daytime working hours. In some ways, just interning can also be more rewarding in the long term: you learn business techniques of



companies outside of the United States, immerse yourself in the culture, improve your language skills, and gain a potentially valuable employment reference for your résumé. Whether it's a summer or a semester, there are generally plenty of real-life work opportunities available out there. As compared with studying abroad, internships and short-term jobs offer:

- **Real work experience**, often in a low-stakes, low-pressure (and yes, fairly low-pay) environment. This lets you make inevitable “global newbie” mistakes with little pressure. Having real work experience on your résumé also gives you a leg up upon graduation, moving on from that low-pay, entry-level job—or moving up and making it a springboard to a real career.
- **Global experience** for generally less money than study abroad programs cost. In many cases, the travel reimbursements and living stipends that internships and short-term jobs offer will let you break even and maybe even come home with a little left in your pocket, rather than a mountain of debt.
- **The opportunity to stand out** as a self-starter and a go-getter, able to think and work independently from a young age, as opposed to depending on nicely organized study abroad programs.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I spent the past fall semester in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and had a wonderful experience. I left with a strong conviction that I would like to engage professionally in Latin America. Since then, I was offered an unpaid summer internship at the small branch of environmentally focused company TerraCycle in Buenos Aires. The primary mission of TerraCycle is environmental (eliminating the idea of waste through innovative collection and recycling programs), its secondary mission is social (donating funds to nonprofits and schools in the communities where people collect waste through TerraCycle), and only its third goal is financial (making a profit so that it can reinvest funds in the company to make even more environmental and social impact). I feel passionate about this opportunity, but I am not sure I can afford it, so I started looking for funding. I met with an engineering adviser in my academic department who told me that if I present my internship as a research opportunity and bring back deliverables that I could use for an independent study, I can get funding through the school! I am happy about that prospect.*

— Kim Gordon, University of Pennsylvania. Studied abroad in Argentina.

Don't count on getting a professional job later with any overseas business you intern with, but don't be surprised either if it ends up opening some unanticipated doors.

### TIPS FOR PURSUING AN INTERNSHIP

- **Consider going through an agency.** Unless you happen to know, meet or be introduced to someone whose organization can take you on for a meaningful internship directly, you may well be better able to find reputable and rewarding internships—not just gofer work—going through an agency. Agencies can also help arrange internships relevant to your field of study.
- **Talk with your career-services office or academic department.** Don't underestimate the connections your university may have with the private sector. Many universities have global internship directories to assist students in finding internships abroad, both paid and unpaid in a multitude of sectors.
- **Consider the benefits of various employers.** A large multinational company may offer an impressive name on your résumé and networking benefits, but probably not much real work experience. A small, local company will probably give you more hands-on opportunities and responsibilities, but is less likely to translate into a networking opportunity.
- **Know that qualifications matter.** If you have some background in a business-related field, you certainly have an edge. Being able to communicate in a second language gives you even more of an edge.

## U.S. Taxes and Local Taxes

Living or working outside the United States does not absolve you of your responsibility to file all relevant taxes, and you must include whatever income you earned working overseas. However, you may also be entitled to certain deductions, exclusions and credits under U.S. law, as well as international tax treaties and conventions between the U.S. and foreign countries. For more information, go to [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). In addition to paying U.S. taxes, you may also be responsible for paying local taxes in your host country. Be sure to do your research and find out the process for reporting and paying.

## Volunteering

If the cost of a formal study abroad program is just too expensive, but you still want the experience of living overseas, consider volunteering. Unless the volunteer program covers living expenses, you will still be responsible for those. But you won't have to pay tuition and you will still be getting exposure to a culture and usually plenty of opportunities to practice a foreign language. Programs in developing countries typically involve the lowest on-the-ground costs, but getting there can be quite expensive.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*The week after I graduated with my bachelor's degree, I gave away everything in my apartment and moved to a Buddhist monastery near Mt. Everest where I would spend the summer teaching English as a volunteer in Nepal's Himalayan region. After six years of nonstop travel and a grueling workload during my bachelor's studies, I knew that I wouldn't benefit from further education (i.e., the master's program I'd been admitted to) unless I was afforded some serious rest and reflection. My life had been moving along at full speed for years with no break; I was so busy doing that I never had time for thinking. I wanted to go somewhere peaceful, somewhere thought provoking, somewhere that I could live simply, that had a strong sense of community, and where I could contribute in a meaningful way. The monastery fit all of these criteria perfectly. I read some articles about Nepal's history and studied the Nepali language for a few weeks in preparation.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.



# TOP TIPS

## **Top 10 Tips for Making the Most of Your Time Abroad**

1. *Hone your cross-cultural skills.*
2. *Learn from your mistakes.*
3. *Adapt to prevailing norms.*
4. *Make an effort to get to know people.*
5. *Plan your time.*
6. *Pay attention.*
7. *Learn the language.*
8. *Limit your use of distracting technology.*
9. *Explore people, places and culture.*
10. *Step it up a notch by working or interning.*

CHAPTER 9

## Transitioning Back to Life in the States

Alas, it's time to go home. Whether it's only been a few weeks or a whole year, your study abroad experience probably just flew by, and you're wondering where the time went. Undoubtedly, there are things that you still want to do and see, and perhaps you've already extended your visit. Or maybe you are ready to go home. When it's finally time to return home, most people feel a combination of excitement and nervousness: excitement because you're going home to see your family, friends, and catch up on all the things that you've missed. But you're probably also feeling a twinge, if not more, of nervousness. You may be worried about how you will reintegrate with your friends, who've gone on with their lives while you've been away. Perhaps there's a club or team that you've been absent from, and you're not sure that you will be able to just slide back in smoothly. Or maybe you left a boyfriend or girlfriend behind, and you're concerned about what is going to happen next.

This chapter takes you through the various feelings you may have, as well as the steps that you can take to constructively ease back into your life in the United States. Above all, however, be sure to keep three things in mind. One, you are in charge: some people may offer help, and others' words and actions may have an impact on you, but you are ultimately in charge. It is, after all, your life and your emotions. Two, it's going to take time: you just cannot rush some things, and reintegration is one of them. Generally speaking, the longer you've been away, the more

difficult it will be for you to readjust and the longer it will take. But it will happen. Three, don't let the return to familiar surroundings be the end to your international experience. Work at figuring out how best to make your study abroad experience become part of the new you moving forward into the rest of your life.

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*It was very difficult for me to think an eye-opening chapter of my life was closing. I did not feel it was an adequate amount of time (five months in college) for me to really understand the Egyptian society and Arab region. I needed more time.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

*I almost felt that while I was abroad, my life was on hold for a year. Coming back to the United States, I was immediately swamped with the stresses of getting credits transferred effectively, graduating and beginning to think about my plans for life after college.*

— Melissa, Michigan State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Turkey.

*Coming home from an experience like study abroad, you realize that the day-to-day activities that you were concerned with in the past seem trivial. It no longer worries me to make a call to a potential employer, because for four months I struggled speaking another language to complete strangers who judged every word. You will find that your self-confidence and your vocabulary will have increased dramatically.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.

## Learn to Tell a Good Story

We all enjoy a good story, whether it's a movie, a novel, or something a friend is sharing with us. Science shows us, in fact, that our brain reacts differently to stories than it does to straightforward facts. A good story enables the listener to actively participate in the events of the story by activating the appropriate region of the brain. For example, when a story involves foods or sounds, our sensory cortex lights up—it's engaged in the story—enabling the listener to more fully participate.

### QUICK TIP



*Listeners typically remember the openings and closings of stories best, so be sure to make them worth remembering.*

Therefore, the better that you are able to tell a good story (or two or three) about your time abroad—stories that capture your experience in a simple, engaging, yet dynamic way—the better you will be able to connect with your audience, be they friends, family, roommates or potential employers. You can relate your study abroad experiences to your audience, bringing your time abroad into the conversation, but in an interesting meaningful way.

So how do you tell a good story? Here are a few basic tips.

- **Keep it simple.** As much as we might be inclined to believe that greater complexity and more details make for a better story, it's just not true. Simple stories are more likely to stick because they're easier to process. Use short sentences and reduce the number of adjectives, adverbs and complicated nouns.
- **Use rhetorical devices and emotion.** Don't just recite a story, *tell* a story! Emotions motivate us, so engage your listeners by using inflection, varying your pace, and pausing for effect. Use your hands, your face, and your body for extra emphasis, as well as language that is heartfelt and emotional.

- **Bring it to life.** Make your story more engaging by capturing events using sensory language—what you saw, how it sounded, what it tasted like, and what it felt like, emotionally or physically.
- **Don't be trite.** Some phrases have been so overused that we effectively don't hear them anymore. This is especially true in telling study abroad stories. For example, "I had the best time of my life!" or "I can't even begin to explain how great it was!" Choose your words carefully, using language that reflects your special journey.
- **Have a sound structure.** Your stories should have a strong opening that clearly establishes the setting and necessary background information; a concise but compelling narrative, preferably one that includes a protagonist and antagonist (which are not always people); and ends with a definite resolution, preferably one that involves a lesson learned. Don't go off on tangents or you risk losing your audience.
- **Make it relevant.** Although your story is probably all about you, avoid telling it that way. You must find ways to bring your audience in so that they can relate to what you're telling them. Tailoring your story so it touches on common ground with your listener will help you make that connection.
- **Stick to the facts.** Most listeners can tell when you're exaggerating or embellishing, so don't risk losing them—and your credibility—by doing so. If you find that your facts just aren't compelling enough without embellishment, it's time to get a new story.

Learning how to tell a good story—and practicing that story—will also make you feel good about sharing your time abroad. As a result, the likelihood of your freezing up and not knowing what to say when people ask "So how was your time abroad?" is significantly reduced if not actually eliminated altogether. In time you may well develop a small repertoire of stories: short ones, longer ones, ones that deal with a variety of aspects of your time abroad so that you can respond appropriately to various audiences and situations. You will have to decide which one to tell, but you will need to be prepared to tell all of them. As you prepare for interviews, make sure you have a few study abroad stories that you can relate to the job, your soft skills or qualifications, your cross-cultural competency and experience, and simply who you are as an interesting, global thinker.



## Recognize that You've Changed

There's no denying that living in another country, especially one in which another language is spoken, changes you. How widespread and deep those changes are depends on who you are, how comfortable you felt overseas, and how long and how deep your cultural immersion was. It may be confined to just a few superficial tastes or mannerisms, or it may cut to the bedrock of your core beliefs. But make no mistake—one way or another, your head will forever be screwed on differently.

FROM A STUDENT

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*My lifestyle in Argentina was neither all better nor all worse than my lifestyle in the U.S., just different. I loved the constant challenge of better integrating myself at my school, with new friends, or in my host mother's house. Given the immersive nature of my program, I took pride in the little things: I ordered the sandwich I wanted this time; the lady at the bakery knows my name; I had great conversation with someone today. Life is too easy now that I am back in the U.S. I know my way around campus, and I do not feel the need to study any maps before leaving its premises. I can, however, appreciate some of the opportunities my university offers students. The amount of resources I have in the U.S. (dining, academics or transportation) was something I did not always enjoy abroad.*

— Kim Gordon, University of Pennsylvania. Studied abroad in Argentina.

*My time abroad influenced how I feel as a black American. The black race has many nationalities, as does the white race. I have learned that race is not so important compared to nationality. In my time abroad I have experienced the complexities of being black in a predominantly white country, however, being identified as American seemed to shed light on my "blackness," which I do not believe is dark but apparently that's the feeling that some others had toward me. I am aware of negative stereotypes that are as associated with African-Americans and even the black race in general, here and in other parts of the world. I have witnessed people of different races behaving very timidly toward me, and whenever I am ostracized, I typically think it's because of my race. However, it seems that people's actions toward me became more positive when they learned that I am American.*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.

To be sure, each person's experience is going to be unique, even if they attended the very same program at the very same time. And that is because each of us is unique. But there will also be much common ground since we are all human beings undergoing formative life experiences. But don't just sit back and let the process play itself out however it will. It's important for you to understand how you've changed and how you can make the most of it, especially after graduation as you enter the workforce. You will likely find many ways that you have grown as a result of studying abroad.

### **PERSONAL GROWTH**

- **A greater sense of independence**
- **Better communication skills**
- **An enhanced ability to build relationships**
- **Increased adaptability**
- **A greater acceptance of diversity**
- **Increased patience**
- **Improved diplomatic skills**
- **Strengthened or reinforced core values**

And because you've changed, your relationships with other people will invariable change as well. You may think your friends and family have done most of the changing, but odds are it's probably you. In order to fit back in, you are going to have to come to grips with this. But remember: you will be reengaging with friends and family as the new you, not the old one.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Study abroad has made me more gregarious and willing to explore different cultures. It has had more direct influence on my personal life than my career. I can see the value in how it helped me relate to and communicate better with others, because I deal with a variety of people in my work.*

— April R. Gillens, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in Ireland.

*I was able to completely let myself go and dive into my experience living abroad, something not many people have the opportunity to do. Not only did I experience studying and working in Spain, traveling across Europe, and building a network of friends in and outside of school, but I did it by myself. I was given a great deal of responsibility, which allowed me to grow independently.*

— Daniel Schlemovitz, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in Spain.

*I found the greatest benefit from studying abroad to be personal independence and courage. Having moved to Spain, traveled to two continents, and reestablished a personal network of friends and family in a foreign environment, I've really grown as a person. I didn't notice my walls breaking down when I was abroad, but coming back to the United States I can see a clear difference in myself. I'm no longer afraid to take chances in life, and I try to live out each day to the fullest.*

— Gregory Chocheles, Bryant University. Studied abroad in Spain.

## Prepare for Reverse Culture Shock

Many returning students find that they suffer from reverse culture shock. This comes because you expect things to just be the same as they were before you left. But they won't be because you have grown accustomed to dealing with everyday things in a different way in your new environment. Readjusting will require using the same skills and approach that you had to use to adjust when you landed overseas. You can do it, and you will. But it takes time. Here are some of the problems you may encounter:

## Other Peoples' Lack of Interest

While you were abroad, you probably did some amazing things, saw some fantastic sights, and had some once-in-a-lifetime experiences. So your return should be a media event, complete with microphones and TV coverage, right? Well, don't count on it. Sure, plenty of people will want to know how your study abroad trip went, and they will no doubt ask you, especially at first. And you will get an opportunity to share your adventures and regale people with your stories. But you will probably soon discover that many of your listeners are just being polite. Instead of peppering you with dozens of questions—some of which you have probably anticipated and even have prepared answers for—you'll find most of them asking just a few superficial ones before moving on to last week's football game, the new transfer, the antics of this or that Greek house, and the new menu at the dining hall. You'll be floored and will probably find it depressing that even those you considered your good friends aren't anywhere near as excited as you are about your dream-fulfilling and life-changing experiences. Don't worry. Both your feelings and your friends' behavior are completely normal.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*My culture shock was worse coming home. I grew so accustomed to Madrid and my surroundings there; it felt like home. I realize I was so much happier there because of the fantastic things I was experiencing, but I found people in the U.S. to be less friendly. I also noticed the obesity, which caught me off guard. I was unsure when I would see my friends again and knew people would be less interested in my experiences.*

— Daniel Schlemovitz, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in Spain.

*The hardest thing for me about readjusting was when my friends and family weren't as passionate about Russia as I was. After returning, it has always been difficult for me to gauge just how much I should include "Russia" in the conversation. A friend and I jokingly call it the "Russia is my boyfriend syndrome." After spending time in a foreign country, your experiences become part of your identity, and it is easy to fall into relating anything and everything to your time there. Unfortunately, too much "abroad talk" can inadvertently get on your friends' and family's nerves. I've found that the most helpful thing in readjusting is staying connected with friends from your group. They are going through the same thing as you are and will gladly sing that*

*folk song that you learned in class or reminisce for the thousandth time about the time you adventured to the countryside with your foreign friends.*

— Hope Johnson, Gordon College. Studied abroad in Russia.

*Reverse culture shock seems like one of those “things that will never happen to me.” The truth is: reverse culture shock is just an idea, until you go through it. You will never know what it is like to permanently view your own culture with new eyes, lenses tinted the color of a foreign country, until you experience it firsthand.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year in Argentina. Studied abroad in Spain.

## You Miss the Buzz of Being Abroad

Just being in a foreign environment is inherently stimulating. And the more foreign it is in relationship to your home environment, the more stimulating it inevitably is. So it is hardly surprising that once the spigot of constant stimulation is turned off, daily life can seem downright dull and mundane. You might, for example, miss the food carts and the sack of avocados you used to buy each week. Or the pleasure of stopping by your favorite café to have an espresso and chat about your day with your international friends. Or perhaps you long for the thrill of being able to hop on a train or bus to take a weekend trip somewhere exciting you’ve never been. Once you’re back home, these and dozens of other regular opportunities like them are just no longer available. As a result, your life appears to be significantly less interesting and you long for the buzz and intensity of life abroad.

### FROM A STUDENT

*Using certain Arabic words became natural, as I was beginning to think in the language. I picked up several cultural habits, such as using words such as “la2” (meaning “no”) or “InshaAllah” (meaning “Lord willing” or “if God permits”) for every action, planned or not, that was yet to occur in the future. In Spanish I often say “primero dios” or “ojalá,” which means the same thing, but in English this is not used as part of common conversation. Having to adjust small linguistic habits to conversation once back home was a challenge.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar, Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

## You're Disenchanted with American Things

When you first arrived in your host country, you were probably surprised by a variety of things. For example, the public transportation system may have been excellent, or the size of the house your host parents lived in was very small. The cleanliness, or lack thereof, of the streets may have struck you. The same may happen upon your return to the U.S., albeit to a lesser degree, since there will not be the element of surprise. For example, you may be appalled by the way people act or dress. Or you may find the size of box stores to be overwhelming or food portions wasteful. You may find the jokes people tell to be offensive. You may notice there's a whole lot less diversity in your group of friends than you realized. You may search in vain for a great shepherd's pie, pad Thai, or arroz con pollo, only to be disappointed by "Americanized versions" that don't taste anywhere near as good. Conversely, you may think how very lucky you are not only to have had the experience you did, but to appreciate all over again the life you lead in America.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*It was strange to study abroad in a country where it's not common to wear shorts, short dresses, or sleeveless tops in the streets, and on the flip side, return to the U.S., where the consciousness of clothing—in terms of showing skin—is not as important. I found a balance for myself between what I felt was socially acceptable and how I wanted to feel. You may have to renegotiate certain social norms or recreate certain habits.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

## You Have Less Independence

You've also probably grown accustomed to having either a great deal more independence or being essentially on your own. Using a foreign currency, communicating in a different language, meeting new people, solving problems that arise without much cultural context—all of these things have resulted in a sense of freedom, improved self-confidence, and, most likely, a desire to continue with a similar level of independence. It may be hard to return to campus where most everything you do seems to be a scripted routine requiring only that you follow the herd down its well-trodden path.

## Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock

Experts agree that reverse culture shock is actually more difficult to get through than traditional outbound culture shock. This is because with reverse culture shock, you feel out of place in your own country, and that sensation is generally more fundamentally disorienting than feeling out of place overseas, where you are, in fact, out of place. As with traditional culture shock outlined in Chapter 6, reverse culture shock progresses in three distinct stages. First, everything feels grand as you're swept up in the euphoria of just being back home. But gradually this turns into frustration, depression, confusion and even anger as you find yourself getting irritated with people or things because of difference. Then comes the recovery stage, in which equilibrium is eventually restored. You adjust to living stateside again by finding your new niche and learning how to integrate your study abroad experience into your ongoing life. You are able to move on as a wiser person.

The best way to deal with reverse culture shock is to follow the advice in this chapter, succinctly listed in this list of 10 tips:

### REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK: 10 TIPS

- **Learn to tell a good story.**
- **Prepare to experience culture shock.**
- **Recognize that you've changed.**
- **Keep in touch with your overseas friends.**
- **Seek out others who have recently returned.**
- **Listen to others and relate your stories to them.**
- **Seek out authentic international culture at home.**
- **Look at photos and videos, every now and then.**
- **Plan to go abroad again.**
- **Put your international experience to work.**

## FROM A STUDENT

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*After three times studying in Russia, I've learned that reverse culture shock comes at unexpected times and in surprising ways.*

— Hope Johnson, Gordon College. Studied abroad in Russia.

*My most painful memories of culture shock were not abroad, but at home. After returning home from the Czech Republic, I went through a hard case of reverse culture shock. I went from living in an exciting place where I learned something every day and was challenged, to a small, familiar town in South Carolina. I had changed, and everyone around me had not. My interest, goals and outlook were different from those around me. I was depressed—a driving factor in applying to live abroad again. And so when it came time to return to the U.S. after my year in Slovakia, I was determined to have a plan to help counteract the reverse culture shock and depression I felt before. Moving to Washington, DC (a cosmopolitan city with more like-minded people), helped with the reverse culture shock. Living abroad and returning can be challenging, but it can still be worth it. It was through these experiences that I really discovered my values and priorities. For example, I feel closer to my family through these experiences, and I understand better what I need to be fulfilled. Living abroad can be a lonely undertaking, but also rewarding in the relationships one builds. I can say I know who I am through this experience.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic. Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.

## Keep in Touch with Friends, Old and New

Friends rank among life's greatest treasures. Just because you went abroad for a period of time doesn't mean that you lost your old friends. And now that you're back, it doesn't mean you can't keep in touch with the new friends you made while abroad. Both sets of friends are part of your life and will prove to be important elements of easing back in.

For those friends you left on campus, appreciate that their lives went on without you, even though you may not think those lives were as exciting as yours. They're still your friends. You may notice that they seem different, even if you kept in close contact by Skype or email. As noted above, this probably has more to do with how you have changed as a result of the things you've experienced. But that doesn't



mean that they haven't also changed as the result of some new circumstances in their own lives. They may have a new love interest, have taken on a leadership role on campus, or even come back from their own study abroad experience somewhere else. Work at reconnecting by sharing stories and listening to each other. If you both work at it and are sincerely interested in maintaining your friendship, you'll get through any initial awkwardness and both benefit from your different experiences. If one or even both of you doesn't make an effort to reconnect, however, that friendship may well fizzle out. Just accept that and move on.

**QUICK TIP**

***Recognize the changes in you, but appreciate that your friends and family may have gone through their own changes. Respect them, show interest, and exchange stories to reestablish relationships.***

For the new friends you recently left, you should have collected contact information and said your goodbyes properly, as advised in Chapter 8. Do your best to stay in touch with them. Whether they're fellow Americans, other international students, or residents of your host country, they are an important part of your overall experience in the new culture. You have learned from each other, have had formative experiences together, and have probably forged unusually strong bonds since intense international experiences tend to bind people together more closely. As a result, if properly maintained, these friendships may last for years, if not decades, and become the foundation stones of your global network.

**FROM A STUDENT**

*Make connections and maintain them. One of my regrets is not remaining in touch with any of the people I met while abroad—both Spaniards and other college students from the United States who were studying there.*

— Crescendo Smalls, Wagner College. Studied abroad in Spain.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Returning home felt a little bit like going abroad again. Everything seemed new and different to me, even if I had seen it all before. I think it helped that one of the beliefs I internalized while abroad was that I have something to learn from absolutely everybody around me. My life-changing experience, rather than isolating me by making me think that I had had an experience others hadn't, made me more receptive to learning from what experiences they had had that I hadn't.*

— Jeanette Miranda, Brown University. Spent a gap year in China.



## QUICK TIP

***Regional study abroad reentry conferences are a great place to meet recent returnees from other campuses.***

## Attend Program Reentry Orientations or Conferences

You may find it difficult to reintegrate into the structure and expectations of academic studies after living in a foreign environment. If possible, take some time off between returning home and resuming classes, as the break will give you a better opportunity to transition back to living in the United States. Once you are back on campus, be on the lookout for any programs offered to returning students, including campus reorientations, on-campus courses or workshops, and regional conferences. All of these are designed specifically to help students like you process your overseas experiences and readjust, and you will probably be surprised at how much you can get out of them. If nothing else, you'll meet others in the same situation. But you should be careful not to spend all of your time only with study abroad friends. You need to integrate with the rest of life on campus, too. Otherwise, you may be stuck in a sort of study abroad limbo.

If your college offers a reentry workshop or transitions course, take it. Mandatory participation in such programs is becoming the norm, but some students may still be exempted if, for example, they went abroad with a program unaffiliated

with their college or opted out of credit transfer. Don't skip these courses just because you can. These sessions will help you assess and address the "other life" you've recently been leading. You'll find helpful ways to integrate your study abroad experience into your continued life and studies. You'll also be able to talk about your experiences with fellow student travelers who will not only be able to appreciate them, but quite probably share them. The result will be new on-campus friendships with like-minded global souls.

## Regional Reentry Conferences

Many colleges and universities combine forces to hold full-day, regional reentry conferences for all their recently returned overseas students. Typically, these include sessions on:

- Readjusting psychologically.
- Networking with fellow students who may have similar interests.
- Marketing your study abroad experience to potential employers.
- Learning about international career pursuits here or abroad in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.
- Exploring going abroad again as a teacher, volunteer or intern.
- Investigating overseas graduate programs.
- Applying for scholarships, fellowships and research grants.
- Discussing ways to incorporate your study abroad experience into your life.

The best of these conferences are planned and organized by study abroad advisers and include panels of outside experts who also have post-academic international experience. Photo contests are also often a part of these conferences, thus giving you a sanctioned opportunity to present all those neat photos you've been dying to share. You might even win some valuable or great prizes.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*I attended a reentry conference because I wanted to learn about ways to work and live abroad in the future.*

— Kim Gordon, University of Pennsylvania. Studied abroad in Argentina.

## FROM EDUCATORS

*The reentry phase is often a neglected phase of the study abroad process, both by students and study abroad professionals. Most students don't recognize it as a part of their experience and professionals usually don't have the adequate time or resources to plan appropriately. However, by pooling our efforts together, we as a committee can provide a substantial reentry program to a wider audience. Reentry provides a chance for students to understand the importance of keeping an international experience/perspective "alive," network with like-minded students outside of their own institutions, learn about opportunities from others who have "been there," determine ways to incorporate their international experiences and newly acquired skills into their professional and academic futures, and process their experiences and continuing their global engagement in meaningful ways. It is for these reasons that we as a committee have worked to provide what we think is a substantial and informative conference, and we view it as a service to the field and the newly returned students.*

— Delaware Valley Re-Entry Conference Committee.

**PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Even if your home institution doesn't have a reentry program, it will probably require you to complete a written evaluation of your study abroad program. By all means do so enthusiastically, as your feedback can have a beneficial effect upon future participants. In addition, the process of writing an evaluation can help you to reflect more fully on your time abroad. Completed evaluations are usually made available to students who are considering studying abroad, as well as faculty and administration. A copy will also be sent to your study abroad program (if different), so that program sponsors can hear firsthand what works and what needs improvement. It's important to be honest and straightforward. Most everyone likes to talk about how great certain aspects of their experience were, but not as many are willing to offer constructive criticism, which is arguably even more important. Both, however, enable a program to improve and a college to determine whether individual programs should continue to be recommended.

## Seek Out Others Who've Recently Returned

If you're lucky, numerous other study abroad students will have recently returned to your campus, and you will have little trouble finding them. But don't count on it: after all, less than fifteen percent of American college students study abroad before graduating. If few students at your campus study abroad, you'll have to make more of an effort to seek them out. Ask your study abroad adviser, professors, friends and others you know who have gone abroad in the past if they know of any others who have recently returned. Attend orientations to find like-minded souls. Don't be afraid to make new friends with people who are in the same boat. At the very least, you can provide each other with the support of someone who's been there and gone through that.

In your pursuit of those who've just returned, also seek out others who've been back for a year or more. They, too, can shed light on how they adjusted, give you some tips that might help, and provided some potentially needed empathy.

### QUICK TIP



***Do not let your new and improved language skills fall by the wayside. Keep practicing your language.***

## Maintain Your Language Proficiency

If one of your reasons for studying abroad was to increase your proficiency in a foreign language, then don't stop now and let all the time and effort you put in begin to wear off. Maintain your edge by:

- Registering for ongoing language classes on campus.
- Joining on-campus language clubs.
- Seeking out international students willing to converse with you in the language of your former host country.

- Staying in touch with friends and your host family abroad through Skype or email.
- Reading, watching or listening to news online.
- Listening to music, watching movies, and reading books in that language.
- Reaching out to off-campus community groups who speak that language.

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**FROM A STUDENT**

*Living in east Boston now, with its large Latin American population, makes me very glad that I learned Spanish in Costa Rica. Many of the employees in our local grocery stores don't speak English, and my hairdresser just moved here from Colombia a few months ago. If I didn't speak Spanish, who knows what sort of haircut I might come out of there with!*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.

*My university has a program where you can “adopt” someone studying abroad in the U.S. after you get back to help “show them the ropes” as needed. It’s a great way to practice the language you spoke while abroad!*

— Beth Cubanski, American University. Studied abroad in Costa Rica.

*To continue refining my French, I work as a peer tutor on campus. It’s a wonderful way for me to help someone figure out the language, and more often than not, I learn new tricks, too.*

— Amy Newman, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in France.

## Document Your Memories

In Chapter 5, we recommended that you keep a journal (including photos) of your time abroad in order to track your experiences as they happen and to be able to better recall them later. If you did so, don't now go and put your journal away in the attic along with your backpack. Keep it handy so that you can refer to it from time to time as the spirit or inclination moves you.

Now that you are back, take the time to document your memories in a digital photo book, a video story, a blog or extended post, or even a large poster of photos and quotes. You might even consider doing more than one of these. Some students create very personal, private reflections of their time abroad, while others create websites and mechanisms for helping other students by collating information and sharing stories online. Video posts in particular are emerging as a popular way for students to share their experiences, since the combination of video capabilities on smart phones and computers coupled with free software has made the process so easy. The beauty of a video post lies in its multidimensional nature: you can see and hear a snapshot of you in time, telling stories, showing pictures, and creating a mini-documentary. We advise you, however, not to make it too long (five to eight minutes is best), especially if your intention is to share with friends or your study abroad office!

## Advocate for Study Abroad

As we've already mentioned, you should expect that some, if not most, of your friends and family will soon become bored with all the stories and adventures you have to relate from your time abroad. But there is one group of people who probably won't become bored: potential study abroad recruits. Look into becoming a peer counselor for students who are considering study abroad, and help them make good planning choices. Volunteer as a "past participant" at orientations your study abroad office will be sponsoring for the next group of outbound students. If you do so, however, be sure to remember one thing: Just because you have studied abroad doesn't make you an expert in the field. It simply enables you to share your experiences, both good and bad, with others so that they can profit from them—just like the way that we have used the quotes of a range of former study abroad participants throughout this book.

We mention this because a sizeable study abroad industry has recently emerged in this country. Some of these unaffiliated advisers and consultants claim to be experts on all kinds of information, when in fact they're simply individuals who have limited experience and are mostly interested in selling a particular program, one that may not help students properly prepare for cultural immersion. This creates skepticism in students—and especially their parents—who may come to see study

abroad as either a boondoggle or a cash cow for their sponsoring college or organization. The end result is to reduce rather than increase the number of students who study abroad. As we mentioned in the beginning of this book, we believe that study abroad should eventually become a requirement for all undergraduate degrees. That day is still a long way away, but we can get there if we all work together to improve the system and advocate for truly beneficial study abroad programs.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I volunteer as a study abroad student ambassador to promote study abroad experiences by speaking to first-year students and parents about the programs offered by my university. What I love about my role is that it gives me a way to network with other students, connecting with them and educating them about the options and benefits of experiences abroad.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year in Argentina. Studied abroad in Spain.





# TOP TIPS

## **Top 10 Tips for Transitioning Back to Life in the States**

1. *Learn to tell a good story.*
2. *Recognize that you've changed.*
3. *Prepare for reverse culture shock.*
4. *Deal with reverse culture shock.*
5. *Keep in touch with friends, old and new.*
6. *Attend program reorientations, including reentry conferences.*
7. *Seek out others on campus who have recently returned from studying abroad.*
8. *Maintain your language proficiency.*
9. *Document your memories.*
10. *Advocate for study abroad.*



  
CHAPTER 10

## Using Study Abroad to Showcase Your Global Growth and Learning

Now that you're back and settled in, it's time to put your international experience to good use. Unfortunately, one of the biggest mistakes that students who have studied abroad make is not incorporating all of their global learning into their post-study abroad persona. By this we mean they fail to fully incorporate their study abroad experience in a way that makes their next moves, be they academic or professional, as personally meaningful and rewarding as possible. In business terms, you need to learn to "leverage" what you've learned, who you've met, what skills you've acquired, and how you've changed into a promotional package that speaks persuasively, especially to potential employers, of the new and improved you.

Whether you're interested in a global job here or abroad, or simply want to differentiate yourself from other applicants with potential employers, your study abroad experience can be a useful and powerful tool. As we mentioned at the very beginning of this book, global experience matters in today's job market, more than it ever has before. It's critical therefore that you infuse your job search process with your "global brand." In this chapter, we'll offer an overarching process for you to follow, one that's already proven itself to be successful for others. We'll also explore the various avenues you might be considering after graduation and some practical tips on turning those possibilities into reality.

## Build on Your Global Experience Both On Campus and Off

As we mentioned in Chapter 1, studying abroad is not just about the experience of attending school overseas. It's also about what you'll learn about yourself and how you'll grow both intellectually and emotionally. Now that you're back, the experiencing part is over (for now); but the learning and growing parts can and should continue. First and foremost, you should build on the burgeoning "international you" by continuing to enhance your global awareness and your cross-cultural competency. While you're still a student, that means continuing to explore and experiment with new or expanded academic and personal interests, tastes, styles and ideas. Take advantage of whatever opportunities you can—on campus and off—to incorporate more international experiences and resources into your life. Not only will you learn and have new and enriching experiences, you'll prove to prospective employers that your study abroad term wasn't just another college course, to be put aside once the final exam is over, but the beginning of a long and personal independent study program.

- **Affiliate with global groups on campus.** Most schools already have a few—if not a few dozen—globally oriented student organizations, ones devoted to either a country or a region (e.g., the Italian Club or the Asian Students' Union) or ones devoted to some specific activity (e.g., the African Film Society or the European Student Investors Club). Make a point of seeking them out, finding the ones that interest you the most, and then becoming actively involved. Invariably, they will help deepen your understanding of the regions or cultures that you have come to care about. They will also most likely open doors to additional affiliations and opportunities and provide you with topics to discuss during interviews.
- **Reach out to community organizations.** Depending on where you attend college, there may be a variety of immigrant associations (e.g., Hispanic American Association), refugee outreach groups (e.g., Iraqi Refugees in Minnesota), or cultural heritage societies (e.g., International Focus of Raleigh, the Polish-American Club) accessibly located off campus. All of these present opportunities for you to expand your global education in nonacademic ways and to get a foot planted outside the academic bubble. You may also find language partners.

## TIPS FOR ENHANCING YOUR GLOBAL PERSONA

In Chapter 5, we listed a number of things that you can do to raise your global IQ before you head overseas to study. You should continue and expand on these after you've returned, building on the knowledge you gained overseas. We're listing them again here, slightly modified for the more global you.

- Pay attention to world events and international news.
  - Monitor global business trends and stock markets.
  - Continue to think globally and cross-culturally.
  - Cultivate skills that enhance cross-cultural interaction.
  - Continue to learn or practice a foreign language.
  - Monitor globally relevant apps and blogs.
  - Follow national news online for the country you've just returned from and others you're interested in.
  - Join local and virtual international clubs.
  - Make friends with international students on campus.
  - Pay attention to hot regions and issues you care about.
- 
- **Enjoy global food, music, movies and art.** Share your expanded global tastes and appetites with friends. Instead of the traditional off-campus pizza parlor, head for an authentic Peruvian restaurant across town. Attend a Spanish guitar recital. Watch a Bollywood film or read the latest Shanghai murder mystery by Qiu Xiaolong. Not only will you be maintaining your international intellectual curiosity, you'll probably also discover new areas of interest.
  - **Continue to seek out international friends.** As you know from making friends while studying abroad, the best connections to other cultures are invariably personal in nature. Continue to build these personal bridges, not only with that

particular culture, but with a variety of other ones as well. Ideally, such bridges will be both personally meaningful now and professionally useful in the future. Even going to a campus athletic event or watching an American TV show becomes a cross-cultural experience if you do it with a friend from another country. And your friend can take you certainly deeper into his or her culture than you are capable of going on your own.

- **Travel abroad on a personal vacation.** Being a tourist isn't nearly as mind-expanding as living or working abroad, but it can still be immensely educational and eye-opening, especially if you visit less traditional destinations in the developing world. And by doing so as a freewheeling tourist instead of a student stuck on campus, you can indulge any latent or surplus desire for exploration or adventure.

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#### FROM A BUSINESS LEADER

*Despite the many studies about global thinking, the approach is still in its infancy. At a time when the number of cross-market deals to international markets is accelerating, gaps in the understanding and application of the global mindset persist. One thing is clear: a global perspective will be indispensable in the age of global economies that lies ahead.*

— Steve Finikiotis, principal and founder of Osprey.

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#### FROM A STUDENT

*I am surprised by the continuous self-reflection on aspects of my personality that are products of my experiences abroad.*

— Taylor Binnix, Elon University. Spent a gap year in Argentina. Studied abroad in Spain.

## Network

Network is both a noun and a verb. As a student, you already belong to several networks, for example, your college, dorm, a club, a sports team, or a faith-based group. Now that you have settled back in on campus, you undoubtedly have another network of contacts built up before, during and after your time overseas. Now is the time to start actively networking with them, broadening your contact base, and creating a sustainable network using social media.

Begin by networking with professors and other campus professionals. When outside speakers come to talk about things you're interested in, ask for their business card and request to connect with them on LinkedIn, which is widely considered the best platform for professional networking. Follow experts in your field or country, language and culture of interest on social media. Connect with them if you have the chance. Ask your existing contacts if they can recommend other people for you to connect with. If you do all these things, before long you'll have an extensive network, one that may eventually prove to be instrumental in landing your first job or helping you further down the road in your career.

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### FROM A STUDENT

*Studying abroad broadens one's professional network immensely. I am still in touch with wonderful people I met up to 10 years ago from international experiences. I know I can call on these contacts for personal or professional reasons, and I never would have met them without taking the opportunity to live and study outside the U.S.*

— **Natasha F.C. Diamond, University of California at San Diego. Studied abroad as an undergraduate in Chile and Spain. Studied abroad as a graduate student, George Washington University, in Mexico.**

*My greatest personal benefit was the network I created. In addition to all the Americans I met scattered across the states, I have a friend in almost every North African/European country. I don't have a fear of finding a job or a place to stay while traveling. These networks are so powerful because of the experiences shared and memories made while studying abroad. The bonds are much different than those made in the U.S.*

— **Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.**

## FROM A STUDENT

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*After about a month or two of classes, I made some of the best friends of my life, people that I know I can reach out to now or 15 years down the line. Some of these people will be in my life forever, socially or professionally.*

— Daniel Schlemovitz, Northeastern University. Studied abroad in Spain.

## Identify Lessons Learned and Skills Developed

Only those students who went abroad their senior year of undergraduate study will be concerned about looking for a full-time job immediately when they return to their home campus, and even they won't be if they are planning on going to graduate school first. For everyone else, that day is still to come. In the meantime, however, you don't want to lose the fresh thinking you've returned with, or have recent, standout experiences fade with time. That's why it's important to put some immediate effort into identifying and clearly articulating what you learned so that you can then translate it into global experience and skills in your eventual job search. It doesn't have to be anything formal—just jot down some concepts that you'll want to include on your résumé or that perhaps you're already using in your storytelling.

## FROM A STUDENT

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*My level of social consciousness heightened. I learned what truly holds value in my life, and what others, including myself, may take for granted or consider always accessible. I learned that we—despite language and country-specific differences—are more alike than different. We all have common needs of food, shelter, water, financial income, appreciation, respect, acceptance, love and friendship. I find that if you are kind to people, most likely they will be kind back. The world is a lot smaller than we think, in the sense that technology allows us to stay connected and be “in the know” about what is going on around the world.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.



## FROM A STUDENT

*Years later, I can say that studying abroad and expanding my own comfort zone helped me to more readily acclimate to the profession of law. To be a good attorney you have to accept the fact that you cannot prepare for everything and you must think on your feet.*

— Leah Goodridge, Vassar College. Studied abroad in England.

*I use my knowledge from study abroad every day. It's been a year since I returned from my Fulbright Scholarship in Germany, where I worked as an English Teaching Assistant in Berlin. I am back in school to get my MSc in nutrition and become a registered dietitian; I teach aerobics and will eventually use nutrition to instruct on wellness and healthy lifestyle. The teaching skills that I learned as an ETA have made me much more confident about conveying information and communicating with people. I graduated in 2011 with a degree in English literature, and I wonder if I ever would have felt brave enough to dive into a science degree and completely change fields if it hadn't been for the strength I discovered in myself while living abroad. In Germany I had to negotiate finding my own apartment, bank account, resident permit, and visa, all in a foreign language, and cope with a completely different way of thinking in a new culture. The bravery that I had to muster is something I am very proud of and I think it made me feel less afraid about tackling biology and chemistry courses and really following my dreams.*

— Elise Hannon, University of Pittsburgh. Studied abroad in Costa Rica. Awarded a Fulbright to Germany.

**STUDY ABROAD AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

The AIFS Student Guide to Study Abroad and Career Development, available as a free download at [www.aifspartnerships.com](http://www.aifspartnerships.com), provides students with useful tips and resources on how to take advantage of career connections while abroad and how to effectively market your study abroad experiences to employers.

## Advice on Launching an International Career

The information in the next three sections has been abridged from Stacie Berdan's 2011 book, *Go Global! Launching an International Career Here or Abroad*. The book offers detailed guidance on pursuing an international career. It offers students and young professionals practical advice on how to tackle the exciting yet daunting challenge of developing the necessary skills to land a job in an increasingly global world. The book is filled with useful tips and real-life stories from hundreds of successful internationalists. Available on Amazon.com.

## Define Your Personal Growth in Terms of Your Next Step

Once it's time to actually start looking for a job or internship, you'll need to complete another thinking exercise. What exactly is it that you want? What skills do you have to help get yourself there? And how did your study abroad experience help you? Actually writing your answers down will help you frame experiences, skills, personality traits, and strong points in logically cohesive ways that are relevant to potential employers. Whether you want to pursue an international career in the United States or abroad, compete for a popular scholarship, stand out as a candidate for a globally focused graduate or professional program, or just differentiate yourself to an employer, you should use your study abroad experience to showcase the soft and hard skills that you have acquired. Believe it or not, the ability to craft a clear, concise description of your professional and personal skills can make a remarkable difference in the ultimate success of your job search process.

### FROM A STUDENT

*I had planned to study mechanical engineering since I was little. It was my time in Astrakhan, however, that allowed me to narrow my interests. Standing in front of LukOil's Astrakhan headquarters, impressed, my curiosity about oil's impact on the Russian economy began to grow. That seed has since grown to shape my future professional goals, as I seek out knowledge of the mineral extraction industry, and, in particular, the international role that it holds—especially looking toward Russia and the United States.*

— Cody White, West Virginia University. Studied abroad as a Boren Scholar in Russia. Awarded Gilman Scholarship to study in Oman.

## FROM A STUDENT

*I'm an explorer at heart and love to do and try unpopular things just because I know the experience will be personal and unique. I didn't come to graduate school because of the information in my textbooks; I came because of the people I'd meet and the opportunities I'd find and create with them. I knew that if I was at all hoping to be successful in a global career, I should get out there and make a name for myself in the global environment. And I knew that as an American and native English speaker it would be easier to stand out in a master's program abroad because of my unique drive to succeed, advantage in communicating, and my entrepreneurial spirit for which Americans are so widely and dearly known.*

— Shirah Foy, Belmont University. Studied abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Finland, Guatemala. Completing graduate studies at Aalto University, Finland.

*My time abroad allowed me to explore my true curiosity both intellectually and personally and find out more about my interests, passions, and how I can integrate these into future studies and professional pursuits.*

— Violeta A. Rosales, DePaul University. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar. Awarded a Fulbright to Egypt.

## Incorporate Your Study Abroad Experience into Your Job-Search Materials

Most of you will continue to live and work stateside, but will use technology to customize products and services for clients, customers and colleagues around the world. You will collaborate with workers in locations around the world and, most likely, be immersed in many cultures without ever leaving the United States. Employers, therefore, will be interested in your international experience thus far, and it's up to you to package it properly to sell your skills.

You know that your study abroad experience somehow changed your life, all while enhancing your soft skills. But prospective employers don't. You therefore need to package, brand, and sell your new skills—both professional and personal—to them. Showcasing your cross-cultural competence will be critical to differentiating yourself from the pack. Incorporate this information in your résumé, “elevator pitch,” and cover letter. In fact, if you begin with your elevator pitch, incorporating elements

of your study abroad experience, it will help determine how best to incorporate the same on your résumé and cover letter.

#### FROM AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION LEADER

*In a more global economy, where careers and jobs are increasingly competitive, a person with a disability who has study abroad experience as part of their résumé will skyrocket to the top and will break down preconceived notions about what is possible for the employer looking for a well-rounded, enthusiastic person looking to join their organization. I consider myself a wheelchair rider who is passionate about international travel and cross-cultural understanding.*

— Susan Sygall, CEO and cofounder, Mobility International USA.

## Résumé

Your résumé is probably your single best opportunity to showcase your skill set, so draft it with the descriptive flair and detail that highlights your achievements while also demonstrating your ability to communicate. There are many excellent guides to résumé writing, so consult them if you have any questions about strategy and execution. Our focus here is on incorporating your study abroad experience, including cross-cultural aptitudes and international skills. Ideally, this should be done bit by bit throughout the résumé, but without repeating yourself. For example:

- “Spent a semester in Paris at Sciences Po taking banking, economics, publishing and media classes taught by a group of European professors, which provided a fresh non-American perspective on business.”
- “Able to read and write Arabic, fluent in Egyptian dialect; worked as volunteer news copy translator for Al Jazeera during the Egyptian uprising in February 2011.”
- “Spent one semester at Universidad de Buenos Aires; this included two Spanish-only classes in history and literature, and work as an English tutor for UBA Outreach.”
- “Followed up one semester studying public health issues at the University of Cape Town with extensive travel throughout Botswana.”

- “Took a series of international relations classes that incorporated a consulting abroad project on renewable energy in Sweden, and then studied the complex regulatory environment for market extensions in China.”
- “Spent three consecutive summers volunteering with Sankalp Volunteer Society in India, working with girls and women on issues of education, health care and nutrition in rural areas near Jaipur.”

## FROM A STUDENT

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*Professionally, I don't think I could get a job in Washington working on African issues without having traveled to Africa. It's given me credibility that I could never get from reading books or taking classes exclusively in the United States.*

— Robert Hurtekant, who uses a wheelchair, Georgetown University. Studied abroad in South Africa.

*I'm now a teaching assistant at the middle school in the town where I graduated college. I didn't major in education, but my goal is to get certified to teach after I gain experience in the school system. Traveling has definitely helped me in my career. In every interview I've had, it always comes up, and potential employers are always impressed. Suddenly we're no longer talking about my previous work experience, we're now talking about how awesome my education experience has been. And if you don't have the most impressive work experience on your résumé (what recent college grad does?) this can definitely work in your favor.*

— Kenneth Buff, Northern Oklahoma College. Studied abroad in England, Italy, Ireland, Wales.

*I have been accepted into a top-ranked graduate school. I am a first-generation college student who didn't even score in the lowest bracket of the ACT. My grades in high school were mediocre at best. My study abroad experience helped me in interviews because I was able to share worthwhile stories about overcoming my biggest challenge or how I met new people. I plan to use my experience to demonstrate to a future employer how I can adapt to any situation they put me in, because I've done it before.*

— Mandie Maxwell, Shawnee State University. Studied abroad in Morocco.

## Job Interviews

Prepare to answer questions about your time abroad. But please don't say, "It was the best time of my life!" or "I got to travel and see so much great stuff!" Employers, hiring managers in particular, do not place much value on what you did as much as what you learned. They will want to know what new skills you developed in order to adapt to the culture. And they will want to know if you can transfer those skills to the work environment. To best prepare, consider the job description. Find out as much as possible about the work environment and projects. Be able to answer questions that relate your skills to the job, referencing examples from your time abroad.

### Emphasize Your New Skills

- Creative problem-solver in unfamiliar situations.
- Adapts well to culturally diverse teams to add value in a specific way.
- Practical knowledge of a specific culture and language and ability to apply it.
- Ability to consider various business situations from different perspectives: cultural, economic, political or regulatory.
- Excellent listening and diplomacy skills.

Each of these examples should be followed up with a specific, yet brief, example from your own experience.

#### FROM A STUDENT

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*I talk about my semester abroad during every one of my interviews. No matter if the job has an international aspect or not, employers are always fascinated to learn about what I have gained from such a culturally rich experience. It is imperative to leverage your experience in job interviews, especially if you spent time learning another language; it shows that you are both committed to a goal and are able to thrive in diverse environments.*

— Benjamin Pauker, George Washington University. Studied abroad in France.

## Seek Out Opportunities to Work on Global, Virtual Teams

Unfortunately, over time your study abroad experience is destined to become dated. So if it's been a while since you were abroad, you may need to renew or recharge your experience. A good way to do this is to seek out an introductory-level job or internship that employs global, virtual teams, i.e., ones with members on several continents, speaking multiple languages, covering chaotic time zones. Fortunately, such teams are increasingly commonplace, even among smaller companies. If you do find one, it should enable you to continue to improve your cross-cultural skills and build on what you gained while studying abroad. Understanding and proactively managing cross-cultural differences can be a strong competitive advantage, so be prepared to showcase your ability to work virtually and to communicate your cross-cultural awareness.

### QUICK TIP



***Use social networking tools to build your online brand. Be professional and authentic!***

## Leverage Your Language Skills

It wasn't so terribly long ago that just being conversant in a second language was considered good enough when it came to job qualifications. That doesn't seem to be the case anymore: fluency is definitely preferred, if not actually required. But if you hope to have your language skills, whatever they are, help land you a good job, you certainly can't afford to let them get rusty. Throughout this book, we've provided tips on how to incorporate language learning before, during and after your study abroad adventure. Don't slack off now that you are back; practice your language skills as often as you can so that they can be used to your best advantage when looking for a job. If you are fluent, here are few practical tips to follow:

## Using Language Skills in Your Job Search

- **Be prepared to be interviewed in that language.** The employer may not have someone in the office able to assess your language abilities, but many organizations are now bringing in native speakers via Skype. Practice your interview questions in both (or all) languages.
- **Search for positions using language key words.** The shortage of dual-language skills is significant in the United States. If you search for jobs using large job-search sites such as SimplyHired, Ladders or Indeed, revise your search to look for those positions that require second language skills. You might be surprised at the number and diversity of openings.
- **Use your network.** Though highly prized, second language skills are still uncommon, so make sure that your contacts know about any other special skills you possess. Ask for informational interviews at organizations that might need a combination of your language and technical skills.
- **Consider the U.S. government.** If you have a knack for languages or have studied a language that certain government agencies have defined as “critical” (identified in Chapter 4), you might find plenty of interesting opportunities in the Foreign Service, military, CIA or FBI, as well as in the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Commerce, Department of Health and Human Services, and other federal agencies.

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### FROM A FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER

*If you can show employers that you have successfully lived and worked or studied in a developing country, it's much easier to get them to believe you are capable of facing challenges.*

— Jessica Chesbro, who has a mobility disability and is a foreign service officer with the U.S. Department of State.



## Pursue an International Career

Whether you want to start your own venture or seek a position at an established organization, landing your first international assignment is destined to be a huge step up, and quite possibly the toughest one you'll make in your entire career path. You're still unproven and you'll have to differentiate yourself to a global employer (or financial backers) based on your background, interests and aptitude.

### FROM A BUSINESS LEADER

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*As a business executive, board member, and former ambassador, I say that any pivot to Asia-Pacific, Europe, Africa, or elsewhere in the Americas needs to be more than about diplomacy and defense. It needs to include cultural, business, and educational exchange. For those lucky enough to have both the opportunity to study abroad and also the commitment to make it work, I say, start packing and go global.*

— Curtis S. Chin, former U.S. ambassador to the Asian Development Bank and managing director, RiverPeak Group, LLC.

## Develop a Strategy and an Action Plan

If you are interested in an international career, you will need to have a strategy and a disciplined plan of action. You won't get there by hoping and waiting to see what comes along; you have to figure out what it is that you want, and then go out in search of it. Your strategy should mirror the "elevator pitch" you have already devised. It should take into account:

- The type of job you are seeking.
- The geographic and/or cultural areas of greatest interest and/or in which you have the most extensive background.
- The general approach you are taking to finding and applying for jobs.

Your strategic approach will depend largely on your field and your preferred regional/cultural areas, but may include:

- Joining or attending meetings of professional or trade associations in your field, including trade, business, cultural, scientific, educational or other exchange organizations concerned with your regional or cultural area of interest.

- Reviewing and regularly reading trade journals, websites, conference reports, and the like to better understand which organizations are hiring and for what types of jobs.
- Setting up automated searches on websites and job boards that hire in your field and/or region. But remember: the best jobs are frequently never advertised at all, but filled by word of mouth.

### Gather Intelligence

You've got to do the work to figure out where the jobs are, which organizations are hiring, and which opportunities best fit your personal skill set and experience. At a minimum, you should be able to answer the following:

- What are the growth areas in your chosen field, both technically and geographically? What about those areas interests you, and how can you link them to your background and skills?
- Which are the best organizations to work for in your chosen field and region? What makes them stand out? What are they looking for in an employee? What areas are they hiring in?
- What specific locations do you most want to work in, and why?
- Who in your network has a connection that might be of help?

### Identify Countries, Industries and Sectors

In addition to your own preferred geographic location, be sure to consider industries, natural resources, large-scale infrastructure projects, and especially the rise of strong national companies in China, India, Brazil, Mexico and other emerging markets that are now expanding their manufacturing muscle around the world. Cast your net far and wide across all sectors, including multinational companies, government, the not-for-profit sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and academia. Here are a few tips to follow:

- **Be prepared to go where the jobs are.** If you're looking for a glamorous stint in London, Paris or Rome, think again. The growth just isn't there. Moreover,

with the advent of the EU and cross-border workers, there's even less need to import Americans, though it would certainly help if you had an EU passport. Right now and for the foreseeable future, most international opportunities lie in the key growth markets of China, India, Brazil, Russia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and certain key countries in Africa.

- **Be prepared to work domestically for a few years.** Not surprisingly, many organizations will want to test you here at home before they send you abroad. Such a policy can actually be to your benefit by setting you up for more senior postings. In addition, once you are inside an organization, you will have advance notice of emerging prospects and be on the inside track. When you interview, therefore, sound out the situation to determine if there are any realistic global opportunities to be had once you are in the door and have proven yourself. Be open to possibilities, but also be mindful of the fact that there probably aren't going to be any promises made and that you will have to be content with whatever it is that you will be doing in the meantime, often for a year or more.
- **Focus on growth industries.** Keep your eye on stocks, media reports, and industry indicators to figure out where the most sustainable growth is. Engineering, health care/pharmaceuticals, consumer products, energy and finance are hot now, and probably will continue to be for the foreseeable future. But there may be other up-and-coming fields as well. Following a range of credible news outlets will help you separate short-term blips from long-term trends.
- **Pay attention to global expansion.** The presence or expansion of multinational companies, nongovernmental organizations, government investing, and not-for-profit organizations are often indicators of markets on the rise. Entrepreneurial activity can also indicate a hot market, especially for self-starters and risk takers. Do some in-depth analysis on GDP growth, microfinance activity, and entrepreneurial expansion.
- **Explore the public and not-for-profit sectors.** There is a wealth of opportunity beyond traditional business, including in the U.S. government, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, not-for-profit organizations, and other huge international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

## FROM A STUDENT

*Studying abroad increased my awareness of the multifaceted issues and sociocultural factors that impact various health outcomes in other countries. My time in South Africa allowed me to explore some of those factors as part of my public health research in pursuit of my doctoral degree and a career as an independent public health researcher. My goal was to work with different populations using culturally appropriate research methods to help them develop solutions to some of their most pressing health issues. Now I am a behavioral scientist working on community-level research both domestically and globally in an effort to improve the human condition.*

— Darigg C. Brown, Pennsylvania State University. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in South Africa.

## Go Abroad Again

Many students enjoyed their time abroad so much that as soon as they graduate, they go abroad again, as travelers at the very least. As mentioned in Chapter 3, a “gap year” traditionally refers to the year between graduating from high school and entering college, which may be spent traveling or working abroad. But increasingly, many college graduates are doing the same before beginning graduate school. In addition to working, interning and volunteering (see Chapter 8 for more information on these last two), here are some other avenues worth considering.

## Pursue Global Graduate Studies

Graduate students now have a wide range of programs that allow them to be overseas for a semester, a summer or a year, including actually completing part of their graduate degree at a foreign university. Business schools in particular are leading the way in offering global degree programs that actually require participants to spend a semester or more abroad. But they are not alone. Many universities now offer globally relevant degrees in transnational fields such as environmental studies, world trade and epidemiology. And there is always the option of enrolling at an international university and earning your degree abroad—more and more universities around the world now offer graduate programs fully taught in English. As noted in Chapter 4, there are plenty of scholarships and research fellowships out there for

would-be graduate students. Check out IIE's [www.studyabroadfunding.org](http://www.studyabroadfunding.org) for more information on the wealth of study abroad funding opportunities available for a wide array of academic specialties and geographical locations.

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#### FROM A STUDENT

*Before studying abroad, I was pursuing studies in biochemistry at my university. While in Cape Town, I held concurrent volunteer positions at a hospital and a local human rights organization, thereby enabling me to experience the operation of the South African health system ... Upon my return to the U.S., I added a major in global health and am now in graduate school studying international health systems for work in health policy, economics and financing in low- and middle-income countries.*

— Isabelle Feldhaus, University of Southern California. Studied abroad as a Gilman Scholar in South Africa.

*While I used the Boren Fellowship to travel to Morocco and learn Arabic, I think that at its core, the fellowship allowed me to have a greater appreciation and understanding for a culture different from my own. And yet, somehow, maybe it was not so different after all. I think that the experience showed me that I can take risks and adjust to life and be successful in a completely different environment ... having a very deep understanding of a language and having experienced another culture gives me the confidence to know that I can pursue research and seek out knowledge of other areas of the world, too.*

— Eric Fischer, University of San Francisco. Studied abroad as a Boren Fellow in Morocco.

## Join the Peace Corps

The Peace Corps is a volunteer service program run by the U.S. government. The stated mission of the Peace Corps is to promote world peace and friendship, and this includes three goals: providing technical assistance; helping people outside the United States to understand American culture; and helping Americans to understand the cultures of other countries. The work is generally related to acute social and economic needs in developing countries. Peace Corps Volunteers are American citizens, typically with a college degree, who commit to work abroad for a period of 24 months after completing three months of training. Volunteers may work with

governments, schools, nonprofit organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and entrepreneurs in education, business, information technology, agriculture, and the environment. When their commitment is finished, volunteers can request an extension of service. For more information see [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov).

## Teach English Abroad

Teaching English abroad offers the opportunity to earn money while getting to know a culture, including its language, extremely well. (In many countries, you won't even need a work permit; but you might need a certificate, so check into it.) Teaching English, however, is not just a matter of having someone write or speak to you and then correcting all their mistakes. You must know the underlying grammatical rules and be able to explain them cogently as they compare to the local language. Anyone with a bachelor's degree is typically accepted for many English teaching positions, but potential teachers should still get certified in TEFL or CELTA. Providers of these certificates usually offer a basic one-month course that teaches you the basics of teaching English abroad, as well as helps place you in a suitable classroom. Placement will probably be an important factor when deciding which course is best for you, so be sure to do your due diligence before signing on. And if you do choose to teach English abroad as a step along your ultimate career path, be sure to set yourself a specific timeframe. If not, you might continue for years without advancing your career.

### FROM A STUDENT

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*I spent 10 months teaching 19 classes of conversational English in a high school in Bratislava, Slovakia. I would say this was overall a positive, life-changing experience. I met so many lifelong friends and contacts.*

— Anna Lippard, Coker College. Studied abroad in Italy, Czech Republic.  
Awarded a Fulbright to Slovakia.

## **Pursue with Passion!**

*“Authenticity” continues to be a big buzzword in organizations. Demonstrating global passion—not only in having had the experience, but also the conviction that it is and will continue to be important—cannot be faked. To further your career, you will need to talk about global awareness in a meaningful way, telling your own story and making connections. Many study abroad alumni have transitioned from their initial overseas experience into successful and rewarding careers. We encourage you to use your experience abroad to do the same.*

*In the following section we offer eight inspiring stories of students who have taken their study abroad experiences and leveraged them to great heights.*

*Read on!*

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*If you have a compelling story to share of how you’ve leveraged your study abroad, send it to us! Contact IIE online at [www.iie.org/studentguide](http://www.iie.org/studentguide).*

## Natasha F.C. Diamond | *Consulting for Global Resources*

I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to study for a semester in Chile during my sophomore year of college, for a year in Spain during my junior year of college, and for a semester in Mexico during my second year of business school. I always loved the feeling of being in entirely new surroundings and having to figure things out on my own and in a language that I did not grow up speaking. These experiences were huge for my personal growth and development, but also important from a professional perspective.

I currently work in human resources, not necessarily the first career you would imagine for someone who has traveled to 25 countries and speaks three languages. However, the ability to communicate cross-culturally and work to understand people from different backgrounds is a vital skill in today's global economy. In my current function within an HR consulting firm, I frequently work with colleagues and clients from all over the world. Even when working with my immediate internal team of individuals who are all American, I find that where we grew up geographically, and what our cultural background is, has a great bearing on our beliefs and the ways that we interact with one another. The ability to be patient and to find different ways of communicating the same message to different people can and should be honed while living and studying in a foreign country. I use this skill every single day. I do not think it is possible to succeed in this extremely complex international business environment if one has an insular perspective.

It is difficult to isolate one particular way in which studying abroad has changed my career and helped me to develop professionally. I believe that my experiences created an "eyes open" effect that has never left me. No matter whether I stay in human resources or end up on a different career path, I will always have a broader understanding of the world and a real respect and appreciation for people of different nationalities and traditions. I think that whatever one's career path, the opportunity to study abroad should absolutely be taken and cherished.



## Maya deVries | *Making Research Connections*

It's no secret that the world's coral reefs are declining at alarming rates. I witnessed this fact firsthand during my journey as a Fulbright U.S. Student in Panama. After graduating from University of California, Davis, I enrolled in an integrative biology doctoral program at the University of California, Berkeley.

My Fulbright Fellowship enabled me to conduct my doctoral research on the food web ecology of coral reefs at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) in Panama. I conducted my research at Galeta Marine Laboratory, which is situated on Panama's Atlantic Coast near the Panama Canal. Disturbances to coral reefs, such as overfishing, waste disposal and oil release from ship traffic, have negatively affected many coastal communities whose livelihoods depend on healthy, productive oceans.

Unfortunately, debris that destroys coral reefs also washes onto Galeta's beaches. After three months of spending every day in the water, I could no longer bear the sight of plastic, old shoes and tires on Galeta's otherwise beautiful shores. In response, I created a beach cleanup program that organizes a cleanup every two months with local students and scientists. A highlight for me was when 350 local students, along with the U.S. Ambassador to Panama, volunteered at a beach cleanup that I organized with the U.S. embassy. This program inspired me and Galeta Marine Laboratory staff to start recycling programs in Colón schools. Galeta Marine Laboratory now gives talks to local schools about recycling, provides them with recycling bins, and connects them to local recycling companies.

My most rewarding experience was working with Cambio Creativo (Creative Change), a nonprofit organization started by former Fulbright Students that works with youth in the underserved community of Coco Solo, Colón. I taught students about biology and paleontology in their own "backyard." These students are now regular participants in Galeta's beach cleanup program. Working on these outreach projects dramatically changed how I view my role as a scientist by forcing me to find concrete connections between the public and my academic research.

These experiences in Panama were essential for my development as a scientist, because I learned that communicating my scientific research to a wide variety of people plays an important role in instilling environmental awareness in the community. This insight helped me to lay the foundation for a long-term science outreach program aimed at building connections between K–12 students and scientific research in Panama and the United States. I will develop the program through my NSF Ocean Science Postdoctoral Fellowship, and plan to continue to be involved with it throughout my career.

## Daniel Erchick | *Furthering Access to Lifesaving Vaccines*

If you've heard of Sierra Leone, it's likely been in the context of blood diamonds or the violent, decade-long civil war. I was drawn to the country by a chance to work at a clinic for amputees—to help improve access to prosthetic technologies—made especially meaningful because I was born with one arm. My summer volunteer trip, which was supposed to last only a few months, quickly turned into two years, as I fell in love with the beautiful, now-peaceful country on the coast of West Africa.

I spent my time volunteering in the prosthetic clinic, supporting several of the disability advocacy groups, and later freelancing in writing and communications. I also began a writing project, one that continues to captivate me today: a nonfiction book about the lives of different disabled individuals, which I still hope to publish. The people featured in my book were the most remarkable aspect of my work in Sierra Leone. At the prosthetic clinic, amputees were being trained as technicians and engineers, giving care and comfort to others with disabilities. In a town without electricity, hundreds of deaf children—often viewed as incapable of learning—attended school. Thousands of polio victims had chosen different paths, some begging on the streets, others struggling to build small businesses, a courageous few fighting for disability rights.

In Sierra Leone, I learned what I set out to—a new language, the ins and outs of another culture, and much about how to work in the fields of disability and public health. Unexpectedly, I also came to view my own disability as a source of pride, not an obstacle to be overcome—a subtle but crucial distinction.

It was time to leave Sierra Leone when I could no longer ignore questions that I faced at work. For instance—what were the biggest causes of orthopedic injuries in the area served by the prosthetic clinic? These were questions of public health, and they led me to a master's degree program, and eventually a job, at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. At Johns Hopkins, I narrowed my focus to infectious diseases, which are responsible for disabling millions of people a year. Fortunately, simple interventions, like vaccines and antibiotics, exist to prevent and treat these infections. The tricky part is: how do we deliver these interventions to every corner of the globe? This is my passion.

In pursuit of this passion, I began working part time as a graduate student, and was eventually hired full time as a research associate, at Hopkins' International Vaccine Access Center (IVAC), whose mission is to accelerate global access to lifesaving vaccines through development and implementation of evidence-based policies.

## **Brian Hardin** | *Developing Solar Power*

Winning the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship in 2002–03 has been instrumental in developing my academic career and has truly changed my life. The Gilman Scholarship Program, sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, offers the opportunity for financially disadvantaged students to study abroad at world-class research institutions. I still vividly remember feeling the burden of trying to pay to study abroad. The Gilman Scholarship was my first major scholarship that gave me the opportunity to cultivate my research interests abroad and follow my dream of making solar power affordable.

The scholarship allowed me to study at St Edmund Hall at the University of Oxford. In England, I developed a computer model to design new types of nontracking solar concentrators using genetic algorithms. I also began researching dye-sensitized solar cells, a revolutionary type of solar cell that was invented by Michael Grätzel in Switzerland in 1991. My research experience at Oxford was the main reason why I decided to study abroad in Switzerland and pursue graduate school at Stanford University.

After studying abroad, I returned to the University of Texas at Austin to complete my BS in electrical engineering and continued working on dye-sensitized solar cells. After graduation, I received a Fulbright grant for the 2004–05 academic year to study dye-sensitized solar cells with Michael Grätzel at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne. I spent a year working with experts in the field and developed new nanostructures to be used inside the solar cells. I started my Ph.D. in the Material Science Department at Stanford University in 2005. I spent the last couple of years developing new kinds of dye-sensitized solar cell architectures that mimic photosynthesis and have the potential to increase performance. After graduation, I cofounded PLANT PV, a solar power start-up company based out of Berkeley, California. To date, PLANT PV has raised over \$1.5 million in government funding and \$750,000 in private financing to research and develop new types of solar cells.

## Garrett Langdon | *Pursuing Global Energy*

I had never taken advantage of study abroad programs during my undergraduate studies and was excited to have another opportunity in graduate school. In the fall of my first year, I heard about a short-term program traveling to Cairo in the midst of political unrest and transition. I was intrigued, and wanted to learn how businesses could operate in the midst of such turmoil and uncertainty. I learned a great deal from my clients, as well as the Egyptian students we worked with on location. This gave me a great insight into not just working *with* other cultures, but working *in* other cultures to which I had never been exposed.

My second study abroad experience took me to Sweden, where I spent two weeks consulting with a firm looking to break into the U.S. renewable energy market. My career pre-MBA was focused on the domestic energy industry, and provided me with no international experience. Learning the intricacies of the European energy industry gave me a great deal of perspective and has been extremely valuable as I am interviewing for full-time jobs within the global energy sector. The experience and personal connections I gained have not only helped my résumé stand out, but have allowed me to differentiate myself from other candidates during interviews.

These two experiences led me to enroll in a four-month exchange with a university in Singapore. While the two prior study abroad programs helped sharpen my knowledge and skills, the extended program allowed me to prove that I could assimilate, live and work in a completely different environment halfway around the world. As I continue to pursue job opportunities internationally, this experience has proven to potential employers that I can be an asset to their organization regardless of geographical location, and has opened up a number of new opportunities. In addition, these programs have provided me with a global network of friends and professional connections, as well as incredible memories.

## Malikaa Nixon | *Connecting With Asia*

In the fall of 2009 I embarked on my very first long-term experience abroad. I decided to study abroad in Shanghai, China, for a semester as an undergraduate. The year prior to my study abroad experience I had taken a course on China, and I was fascinated by its history, language, culture and politics. During my study abroad experience I gained a better understanding of China as part of the global marketplace, grasped the language, and had an extensive look into China's history and its importance in today's growing interdependent economies.

Immediately following graduation I joined the Peace Corps because I wanted to travel, learn another language, and increase my knowledge of Asia and development in the region. I taught English to more than 500 students and led high-impact community development projects. I also worked at Bloomberg TV Mongolia as a planning editor. I believe that my Peace Corps experience in Mongolia is very distinctive and has given me unique insights into the development community, the mining sector, government policy, and how the three are intertwined.

The Peace Corps is "the toughest job you'll ever love." It has challenged me physically, mentally and emotionally. There have been times that I am the only American around for miles and the only one that knows how much I miss my family and friends. There are periods of loneliness followed by blissful connections followed by boredom and back again. I am seeing firsthand how slowly the rest of the world can move and learning to accept the new pace, culture, and physical environment. I have learned to enjoy it, savoring the good and the bad. I know that I will return to the United States with amazing stories and insights that would not have come to me by the way of a good job and two-bedroom apartment.

The experiences that I have had abroad have honed my skills. I have become an effective communicator, developed the courage to express different opinions and beliefs, and gained the ability to adapt and act properly in diverse and ever-changing settings. Beginning in the fall of 2013, I will enroll as a full-time master's student in the Program in Global Affairs at Yale University with a concentration in democracy and development in Asia. I hope to use my experience in Asia to handle current and future affairs with China, as well as other countries in the region. I want to give a voice to underrepresented communities and individuals, specifically in China and Mongolia.

## **Violeta A. Rosales** | *Engaging in the Foreign Policy Conversation*

My love of exploring the world through academics, language and music led me to cultivate a diverse set of friends, who initially exposed me to many cultures beyond my own and have developed into work colleagues and mentors. As an undergraduate student and Ronald E. McNair Scholar at DePaul University in Chicago, my intellectual curiosity about Latin America and the Middle East increased and led me to take undergraduate courses within several disciplines on both regions. After studying Spanish for more than five years, I was looking for a challenge outside of my “comfort zone.” Thus, I decided to study Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) at my university before having a study abroad immersion experience.

I was awarded the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, in addition to the Critical Language Award, given by the U.S. Department of State to study at The American University in Cairo for the 2009 spring semester. I took courses on Islamic Art, political Islam, MSA, and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA). I also had the opportunity to travel to Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Syria and Jordan. While abroad, I was awarded a 10-week summer research grant at Princeton University. After my first time in Egypt, I realized my short-term study left me with a desire to continue learning more about Egyptians’ daily life, religion and traditions. Upon college graduation in 2010, I was awarded a Fulbright grant to study Arabic media and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic in Egypt, and was asked by DePaul University to write an article on my observations during Egypt’s 2011 January 25 Revolution. The Gilman and Fulbright scholarships allowed me to develop my academic interests, explore Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and interact with Egyptians from all socioeconomic backgrounds, leading me to work in the field of research, writing and editing.

My passion towards learning more about Egyptians’ perspective on the country’s current sociopolitical climate and the use of art and music in politics keeps me returning back to Egypt, as each time has been an “add-on” to widening my personal and professional paths. I have collaborated with Fulbright alumni to develop an online Central American citizen journalism platform, cohosted online talk shows focusing on Guatemalan issues, worked with Arab social businesses and social entrepreneurs on developing innovative social initiatives in the Arab region, and I am currently an editor at an English-language Egyptian news website. I also have been admitted to graduate school in global affairs at The American University in Cairo. My ultimate goal is to offer my life experiences and creativity to online readers and be a part of a larger conversation concerning U.S. foreign policy to the Arab region. My advice: THINK BIG and meet as many people as you can—network. Hard work pays off, so make a plan and stay focused. Build relationships, especially with your mentors and educators.

## Ivan Gonzales | *Advancing Public Policy*

My undergraduate study at Seton Hall University provided me with a thorough foundation of all facets of the functional aspects of international relations; however, I knew that my education in international affairs would be incomplete if I did not gain firsthand international experience. I made plans to travel to Tokyo, Japan, as part of a summer exchange program to study the convergence of international politics and international economics and its effects on developing Asian economies. The experience proved to be a turning point in my life.

Every aspect of the study abroad process seemed to me to be a new and exciting step forward in my personal growth. I arrived in Japan anticipating a very personal and solitary journey, however, each new contact I made—whether it be with non-American international students or Japanese locals—helped me develop a greater sense of confidence in my ability to communicate across cultures. Furthermore, the professors and professionals I came to contact with in Japan displayed perspectives that involved nuances of the Japanese culture into their analysis of international issues. Through the study abroad program, not only was I able to interface with experts of international caliber, I was also provided access to institutions such as the Tokyo Stock Exchange and Tokyo's Metropolitan Government Building through site visits. I was truly able to experience the Japanese culture at multiple levels. These experiences contributed to the development of a personalized approach in understanding world events, and enhanced my application of theoretical concepts to contentious issues.

I returned to my university with the aspiration of incorporating perspectives from different regions and learning various languages. Many doors that contributed to my professional development opened shortly after. For example, I was awarded a fellowship with the Institute of International Public Policy, a program that attempts to address the growing need for diversity in careers in international affairs by training minority students. After traveling to Japan again, I journeyed to Paris, France, for a semester study abroad to gain proficiency in French at the Sorbonne and further understand international affairs from a European perspective. Having had no experience in French prior to that program, the immersive language experience accelerated my understanding of French and led to a specialization in modern languages. I also engaged in an independent study in the Philippines to observe local and national political dynamics as the country geared up for presidential elections. I learned through my experiences that sound analysis requires applying more than one perspective and that apt evaluation of an issue's impact or significance relies on the ability to see how various elements coalesce.

I knew that by combining my academic coursework with international experiences and immersive language study abroad, I would be better equipped to address future professional challenges in international affairs and public policy. Through my experiences, I was able to develop solid international career credentials and unique qualifications that bring about opportunities to engage in evaluating issues at a high level. I am constantly reflecting upon my experiences and utilizing the analytical skills I honed abroad in my current role as director of the Public Policy and Foreign Relations Program for the nonprofit Pilipino American Unity for Progress. In the organization's aim to educate the public about issues affecting the international Filipino community, I engage in research and cross-national data collection that underpins our issues and policy evaluation efforts. I can think of no better method to enhance one's professional credentials while building one's aptitude for cross-cultural communication than immersing oneself in a foreign culture through a study abroad.





# TOP TIPS

## Top 10 Tips for Leveraging Your International Experience

1. *Build upon your international experience, on campus and off.*
2. *Network.*
3. *Identify lessons learned and skills developed.*
4. *Define your personal growth in terms of your next step.*
5. *Incorporate your experience into your job-search materials.*
6. *Seek out opportunities to work on global, virtual teams.*
7. *Leverage your language skills.*
8. *Pursue an international career.*
9. *Go abroad again.*
10. *Be passionate!*



## AFTERWORD

## Now That You Are Back: Advocate for Greater Global Awareness Everywhere

The world you have grown up in is changing with dizzying speed. And while we don't know exactly what changes are coming next, we do know that globalization will continue to transform societies and that change will arrive at an even faster pace than before. Technology and our global interconnectivity mandate it.

Having studied abroad, you are now part of a select group of people who know that common American views of the world are far too narrow and thus ultimately detrimental to our collective future. But getting others to believe in the importance of global awareness is not easy. Perhaps, in fact, you didn't believe it yourself until you went overseas, since this is a type of awareness that can really only be gained by spending significant time outside the United States. Most Americans still don't even think global exposure serves much purpose, much less consider it necessary for long-term success.

Regardless of where you currently stand on the continuum of global awareness, your eyes have been opened to the undeniable benefits of international experience. In the spirit of your youthful global awareness, we ask that you help others understand and appreciate the value of developing their own global mindset. And not just by studying abroad themselves, but also by learning another language, paying attention to global news, and becoming an increasingly global citizen. It is an enormous challenge, but one that must be met. Emphasize the importance of learning another language before college. Share your stories of cross-cultural competency and success with others, including people with young children. Encourage others to get a passport and start traveling outside the United States.

But most importantly, we are counting on you to use your firsthand experience to convince others to study abroad. We must increase the number of American students going overseas if we hope to build a nation where thinking globally is the norm and not the exception.



## Author Biographies

**Stacie Nevadomski Berdan** | Stacie Nevadomski Berdan is a seasoned global executive, an expert on international careers, and an award-winning author on how to succeed in the global marketplace. She spent the majority of her career at Burson-Marsteller and Unilever, where she served as strategist, coach and counselor to CEOs, politicians and senior executives around the world. Her extensive global leadership experience in corporate communications and marketing, public affairs, organizational communication, and cross-cultural consulting extends across four continents with a specific focus on Asia.

Stacie uses her international business experience to promote the need for global awareness and cross-cultural competency for all in her books, media appearances, bylined contributions, and speaking engagements across the country. Her first two books, *Go Global! Launching an International Career Here or Abroad* and *Get Ahead By Going Abroad: A Woman's Guide to Fast-Track Career Success*, are the go-to guides for global careers. Her numerous broadcast media appearances include NBC's "Today Show," NPR's "Marketplace," ABC News, CNN and FOX, and her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Forbes*, *Fortune* and *Time*. Stacie blogs for the Huffington Post.

**Allan E. Goodman** | Dr. Allan E. Goodman is the sixth president of the Institute of International Education (IIE), the leading not-for-profit organization in the field of international educational exchange and development training. IIE conducts research on international academic mobility and administers 250 corporate, government and privately sponsored scholarship and training programs. Previously, Dr. Goodman was executive dean of the School of Foreign Service and professor at Georgetown University. He is the author of books on international affairs published by Harvard, Princeton and Yale University presses.

Dr. Goodman was the first American professor to lecture at the Foreign Affairs College of Beijing, helped create the first U.S. academic exchange program with the Moscow Diplomatic Academy for the Association of Professional Schools of

International Affairs, and developed the diplomatic training program of the Foreign Ministry of Vietnam. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a founding member of the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), co-president of the Partner University Fund (PUF) Grant Review Committee, and a member of the Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship Program and the Jefferson Scholarship selection panels. Dr. Goodman has a Ph.D. in Government from Harvard, an MPA from the John F. Kennedy School of Government and a BS from Northwestern University, and numerous honorary degrees as well as the Légion d'honneur from France. He was awarded the inaugural Gilbert Medal for Internationalization by Universitas 21 in May 2012.

**Sir Cyril Taylor** | Sir Cyril Taylor is the founder and chairman of the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS), which he founded in 1964 after living in the United States for several years, working in brand management for Procter & Gamble at their headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio. AIFS organizes cultural and educational exchange programs throughout the world that serve some 30,000 students from 100 countries annually. More than two million students have enrolled in AIFS study abroad, Camp America, Au Pair and Gifted programs since 1964.

Sir Cyril also serves as chancellor and founder of Richmond, The American International University in London, an international university that prepares students from 100 countries for international careers and encourages them to become active global citizens. In 1987 Sir Cyril was appointed founder chairman of the City Technology Colleges Trust, subsequently the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and served in this voluntary, unpaid capacity until December 2007. During this period 90 percent of all English secondary schools became either specialist or academy schools. From 1987 to 2007 Sir Cyril served as adviser to ten successive Secretaries of State for Education on the specialist schools and academies initiative. He is the author of numerous books and publications in the education field. In the 1970s, Harper and Row published several annual editions of *The Guide to Study Abroad*, which Sir Cyril coauthored with Professor John A. Garraty and IIE's study abroad expert Lily von Klemperer.

## About the Publishers

**Institute of International Education (IIE)** | The Institute of International Education, founded in 1919, is a world leader in the exchange of people and ideas. IIE has a network of 18 offices worldwide and 1,200 college and university members. In collaboration with governments, corporate and private foundations, and other sponsors, IIE designs and implements programs of study and training for students, educators, young professionals, and trainees from all sectors with funding from government and private sources. These programs include the Fulbright and Humphrey Fellowships and the Gilman Scholarships, administered for the U.S. Department of State, and the Boren Scholarships and Fellowships administered for the National Security Education Program. IIE also provides advising and counseling on international education, and conducts policy research. IIE's publications include the *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*, supported by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, as well as *Funding for United States Study*, print and online versions of *IIE Passport: The Complete Guide to Study Abroad Programs*, and the StudyAbroadFunding.org website. [www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org)

**American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS)** | Founded in 1964, the American Institute For Foreign Study is one of the largest and most experienced cultural exchange organizations in the world. With global offices in five countries, AIFS organizes cultural exchange programs for more than 30,000 participants each year. AIFS programs include college study abroad, au pair placement, international camp staffing, gifted education, high school study/travel and insurance services. More than one and a half million students and teachers have participated in AIFS programs worldwide. AIFS awards more than \$600,000 in scholarships and grants each year. In affiliation with 23 universities in 19 countries, the AIFS College Division organizes study abroad programs annual for more than 5,000 American students during the semester, academic year, summer, and January term. AIFS works closely with more than 500 American colleges and

universities, providing students and faculty with high-quality educational experiences abroad. [www.aifs.com](http://www.aifs.com)

The American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation, an independent, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt public charity, was established in 1967 with the assistance of the late Senator Robert Kennedy to help young people from many nations and diverse cultures to better understand one another. The AIFS Foundation provides grants to high schools, individuals and institutions to encourage international and educational travel. The AIFS Foundation also sponsors the Academic Year in America (AYA) program, which enables more than 1,000 international teenage students to spend a semester or academic year with an American host family while attending the local high school. [www.aifsfoundation.org](http://www.aifsfoundation.org)