

An Essential Study Abroad Checklist

Studying and living abroad – how thrilling! You're signing up for one of the most interesting adventures of your life. That's for sure.

STUDY ABROAD CHECKLIST

But in order to fully enjoy your experience, you'll do well by heeding a few (well, maybe more than a few) tips. Some are essential – you won't even get on the airplane without tending to them. Others are strongly recommended suggestions.

And the sooner you start to plan, the better. Making sure items on your study abroad to-do list don't pile up ensures a smooth transition from here to there. Our manageable time line removes the need to hassle over being busy with one thing after another. Crossing one item off at a time, you'll be hopping along to your destination in no time.

With our study abroad checklist as your guide, you can sit back and concentrate on what's really on your mind: the world you're about to meet!

9 TO 12 MONTHS BEFORE:

Talk to teachers, family, and friends about your plans.

Contact a study abroad placement advisor to collect information on individual programs -- you may use our Study Abroad Program Finder.

Speak to your academic advisor about credit transfer requirements for overseas coursework.

Once you know which program you are interested in, consider the costs and the listed application requirements. It's also a good idea to start delving a little deeper into the country, doing your own research. Don't be shy to ask for contact information of former study abroad students. They'll give you invaluable advice.

If you are on financial aid and/or scholarships, schedule a meeting with your financial aid advisor to discuss the costs and whether financial aid will cover them. (In most cases, it will, depending on your eligibility.) If you are not on financial aid but foresee the need for additional income, apply for financial aid and scholarships.

Ask for recommendation letters.

Gather your transcripts.

Apply for the program.

6 TO 9 MONTHS BEFORE:

Apply for your passport and visa(s), if needed.

Apply for an International Student Identity Card (ISIC). You'll be surprised at how many discounted rates you are eligible for, from museum and movie tickets, to rail passes. And speaking of rail passes, get a student Eurail Pass, Japan Rail Pass, or whatever popular mode of transportation applies to your location.

Join Hostelling International, a network of hostel options – a must for students traveling from one location to another during weekends and school breaks. Like ISIC, membership also offers you many discounts on a wide range of venues.

Familiarize yourself with your host country's language and culture. Soak up on culture books and guides, films, music, food, websites, and anything else related to your soon-to-be host country.

Learn about "culture shock".

3 TO 6 MONTHS BEFORE:

Apply for a credit card that can be used the world over (such as American Express, Visa, or Mastercard).

Watch your grades. Maintain a healthy G.P.A. amid daydreaming about your amazing adventures ahead.

Try to find the host country's version of what you are interested in. If you like soccer, research soccer clubs and teams there; if you're into films, find out about film clubs; if you love alternative indie music, try to scope out their scene online. This is a good way to make friends abroad. The world is increasingly connected; you'll find that many people, no matter where they are from, share your tastes.

1 TO 3 MONTHS BEFORE:

Sign up for a comprehensive physical; get vaccinations and immunizations, if needed. You might have to include your medical record with your study abroad package. In any case, keep it with you.

Book your flight after some research. Your Student Identity Card (ISIC) may come in handy now, offering you a sweet discount.

Notify everyone that depends on you about your departure. Make sure you give plenty of notice to employers, landlords, etc.

A FEW WEEKS BEFORE:

Stock up on any prescription drugs you take. Have your doctor's note authorizing their use (and refills). But make sure that any over-the-counter drugs you carry are considered legal in the host country. (Ask your program coordinator)

Stock up on contact lenses if needed. It would also be helpful to take along a copy of your eye prescription in case you lose contacts or eye glasses and need to get replacements.

Buy medical insurance for your time abroad. It's often included in program fees, but it's still best to check.

Purchase travel insurance to cover replacement costs of lost or stolen items.

Fill out a change-of-address form and have it forwarded to your permanent address while you're away.

Schedule a meeting with your academic advisor to address final concerns about your plans and coursework.

Consider giving Power of Attorney to your parents or guardian for financial and legal matters.

Plan how you will register for your first semester back – you might be able to do it online, but you want to make sure.

See to it that all financial-aid documents (scholarship applications, loans, and FAFSA renewals) are up to date. Know your disbursements dates, amounts, etc.

1 WEEK BEFORE:

Bring a gift for your host family if you are staying with one. If you are staying in a dorm, it still wouldn't hurt to bring a small token for someone local who may end up helping you out a lot.

Get an international cell phone or international phone card.

Make multiple copies of all important documents -- leave one set with your parents, another with the study abroad coordinator, and keep one for yourself. This usually includes at least:

First pages of passport, as well as any page with country specific visas

- Credit cards
- Traveler's checks
- Student ID, and/or driver's license

Make sure you have everyone's phone numbers and addresses – email and otherwise. That means everyone you might need to contact here and there. (Your program coordinators should be on the top of your list.) In addition, leave that same info with your parents or guardian/close friend.

Get traveler's checks or exchange currency for local cash (\$200 worth should do it). Ask for small notes in addition to larger ones. Call your bank to make sure your ATM card will work in your host country. In most cases you can start making withdrawals in the airport after getting off the plane.

CONFIRM YOUR FLIGHT

Buy at least one power adapter/voltage converter. (find out which kind you'll need). Depending on your host country you may need both a plug adapter as well as a voltage converter if you want to take things like an electric toothbrush, hair dryer, or electric razor, etc.

Start packing. That is, put everything together and then take each and every thing that is just sentimental/non-essential out. See if you can carry it all easily on your own; if you can't, it's a sign to let go of more items. By now you should have a good idea about where you're going: the culture, the climate, the customs.

Print out a copy of this study abroad checklist to take with you and refer back to. Reviewing it frequently will help you feel more prepared and relaxed.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

Re-confirm your flight.

Pack your carry-on bag. Include the standard: passport, airline ticket/e-ticket confirmation, emergency contact information, address and numbers of destination contacts, one change of clothes, toothpaste and brush, wallet with traveler's checks, cash and credit card(s), documents and valuables. Note: Keep liquids and toiletries of no more than 3 oz inside small zip-lock bags.

THE DAY OF DEPARTURE:

Arrive at the airport well ahead of time. That means 3 hours or so before your departure time.

If the plane is delayed and someone is going to pick you up, let them know about it! (Common courtesy.)

If no one is picking you up at the airport, know which cab company to take, bus to catch, etc. Arriving in an unknown city and taking the first cab offer that comes your way can cost you.



UPON ARRIVAL AT HOST COUNTRY:

Call your parents or guardian/best friend to say you've arrived safely.

Attend orientation meetings, excursions, lunches, and other events offered by your program. That way you'll also start getting to know your classmates and coordinators – people you'll be seeing on a daily basis.

Be aware of your surroundings, watch your safety (and wallet) and if you need assistance, ask for it. No need for paranoia though. Flashing your wallet and paying with large notes at a kiosk is not too smart. Neither is assuming everyone is out to rob you.

Avoid making disparaging comparisons. Comments like “How can people live without a garbage disposal? Yuck! America is way more civilized” are not exactly going to endear you to the locals.

Share your experiences with others. It's now your turn to offer invaluable, real-world advice.

So you're all set! Having followed our essential study abroad checklist, you can now exhale. Feel free to daydream – you've earned it.