Preparing for Your Journey

From the Hilltop to the World®

A Pre-Departure Handbook for WKU Study Abroad Students
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Introduction

The Office of Study Abroad and Global Learning congratulates you on your decision to set yourself apart by participating in an international education program! In order to help you prepare for your international experience, we are providing this handbook of practical information on a variety of topics. After carefully reviewing the information in this handbook, acknowledge that you have read each individual section in “Items for Review” in your WKU Study Abroad Application and complete the Pre-Departure Quizzes prior to attending a General Pre-Departure Orientation Session.

If you have questions after reviewing this information, feel free to contact a Study Abroad Advisor or bring your questions to the in-person orientation session.

International Travel

Traveling internationally involves a great deal of preparation. It is important to start early to avoid scrambling at the last minute. Apply for travel documents, register your travel plans with the U.S. Department of State, book flights, and familiarize yourself with international travel procedures well in advance of your program start date.

Passport. A passport is an internationally recognized identity document that verifies your citizenship. You must present your passport each time you enter or leave a country. If you already have a passport, the expiration date needs to be at least six months after your return date or you will need to renew your passport before departure.

Keep your passport in a secure place at all times. While you must have it on you when traveling between countries, be sure it is safely stored away in the interior of your backpack, purse, or bag where no one can easily access it. You may choose to wear a passport/money pouch under your clothing for additional security. When you are exploring the city or going about your everyday life, you can simply keep a copy of your passport on you, leaving the original document behind in a secure place. If you are not staying in a secure location, be sure to keep your passport with you at all times.

- How to Apply for a Passport. Visit http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english.html for detailed instructions about how to apply for a passport. Passport processing usually takes 4-6 weeks. If your departure date is less than two months away, you should request expedited service for an additional fee to ensure that you receive it in 2-3 weeks. Check the SAGL Event Calendar for an upcoming Passport Day at WKU, where you can process all passport application materials without a prior appointment.

- Lost or Stolen Passport. If your passport is lost or stolen while you are abroad, contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate immediately. For information about how to report and replace a lost or stolen passport, visit http://travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost_848.html

Visa. A visa is a document that authorizes non-citizens to enter a country or territory and remain for a certain period of time. The authorization can take the form of a document or a stamp in the applicant’s passport. Many countries do not require U.S. citizens to apply in advance for a tourist visa but grant one automatically at the port of entry for a certain number of days (typically 90). If your stay exceeds that period, you may need to apply for a student visa or make arrangements to leave the country and return before your visa expires.

To find out if you need a visa for your program, visit the embassy/consulate website of the country to which you will be traveling. If a visa is required, your program coordinator should be able to provide guidance and appropriate documentation of your acceptance for your visa application.
**Copies of Documents.** Before you leave, make 2-3 copies of your passport, visa (if applicable), and any other important documents that you are bringing with you, such as an official letter confirming your acceptance into the program. Leave one copy behind with your emergency contact(s), along with your travel itinerary and contact information while abroad, and store 1-2 copies separately from the original documents in your luggage. Doing so will facilitate the recovery of those documents in the case of loss or theft. It is also a good idea to leave behind a copy of the front and back of your debit and credit cards with your emergency contact.

**Registering with the U.S. Department of State.** Before traveling abroad, it is important to register your travel information with the U.S. Department of State through STEP, the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program. STEP is a free service that allows the Department of State to better assist you in the case of a national emergency. You can also choose to receive updates on travel warnings, travel alerts, and other information for a particular country.

**Booking Airfare.** If your program fee does not include group airfare, you should begin shopping around for flights at least 3-4 months in advance in order to get the best deal. Websites such as STA Travel and Student Universe offer discounted rates to students. There are numerous website that allow you to compare fares between multiple airlines (i.e. Expedia, Kayak, Orbitz, Travelocity, Cheapair, etc.), but you will want to check those fares against the original airline’s website before booking. Do not forget to allow yourself sufficient time between connecting flights to make it to the next gate even if your first flight is delayed.

**Keeping Luggage Secure.** Keep your luggage with you and in sight at all times while in airports or other transportation hubs. Ask someone on your program to look after your belongings when you need to stop at the restroom or to purchase something.

**INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL TIPS**

- Always keep your luggage with you and in sight.
- Keep your passport hidden away and secure.
- Be prepared to answer questions about the reasons for your travel, where and how long you will be staying, and what you have in your luggage when you go through immigration and customs.
- Familiarize yourself with restrictions on imported and exported goods to know what you are allowed to bring back with you.

**DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST**

- Do I have a passport?
- Is the expiration date on my passport at least six months after my return date?
- Will I need a visa? Have I checked with my program coordinator about visa processes and reviewed instructions on the consulate website?
- Have I made a few copies of my travel documents and left one with my emergency contact?
- Have I left contact information and my itinerary with my parents?

**Airport Security Checkpoints.** Due to heightened security resulting from the 9/11 terrorist attacks, going through airport security is no joking matter. Be careful not to make any comments in reference to weapons or terrorists as you go through security or you risk being detained for questioning. Do everything that airport security officials ask of you. You may be asked to step aside for a more thorough luggage check or a pat down. As long as you have not packed any prohibited items (sharp objects, certain sporting goods, weapons, tools, self-defense items, other dangerous items) and do not demonstrate suspicious behavior, no difficulties should arise.

**Immigration / Passport Inspection.** When you arrive at your final destination, you will go through Immigration, where an official will check your passport, stamp it with your entry date, and perhaps even take biometrics. If you have had to apply for a visa in advance, you will need to present it at this time. You may be asked about the reasons for your travel and the duration of your
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stay in the country. Answer the questions simply and directly. If your program has provided you with a letter confirming your acceptance and details about your program, have it available. Upon your return to the United States, you will go through the same process and will likely be asked about where you traveled, what you did, and what you are bringing back with you.

**Customs.** A flight attendant will provide you with a customs form on your international flights. You will be required to declare items that you are taking with you abroad or bringing back to the United States. You should complete it before arrival, answering all questions honestly. It is not necessary to list in detail everything that you purchased while abroad and the exact value; you can simply categorize items such as gifts, clothing, and souvenirs, and give an estimated value.

Importation and exportation restrictions vary from a country to country. Visit the embassy website of the country to which you are traveling to find out what the restrictions are so that there are no surprises when you pass through customs and immigration. Generally, agricultural products such seeds, cheeses, meats, and other perishable foods cannot be brought back to the United States with you. When you go through customs, an official will ask for your customs form and may or may not ask you any questions regarding the information on your form and/or inspect your luggage.

Additional Resources:

**Health Abroad**

Wellness starts before you go abroad. Be aware of and address any health concerns that may arise. This includes getting a check-up, receiving vaccinations, taking care of prescriptions, researching local health problems, and becoming familiar with your medical insurance before you leave.

**Get a Check-up.** Get a complete physical, eye exam, and dental check-up before going abroad. The quality and cost of dental and medical care may be different while you are abroad and/or more expensive. Be in the best condition beforehand to avoid unnecessary medical attention while abroad. This is especially important if you have a pre-existing condition.

**Vaccinations.** Most vaccines take time to become effective, so it is important to see your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before your leaving. Routine vaccinations are necessary even if not traveling, so check the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)](http://www.cdc.gov) website for a list of routine vaccinations to see which you may currently need. The only required vaccine is against Yellow Fever for travel to sub-Saharan Africa and South America. However, also check the health conditions of the countries you intend to visit to see what vaccines are recommended, as some illnesses or diseases may be endemic to that area. Also check with your physician to see which vaccines are necessary and what special health issues you may need to be aware of personally.
- Visit [Traveler's Health Destinations](http://www.cdc.gov) on the CDC website for more information on your specific country.
- Contact [WKU Health Services: Travel Clinic](http://www.wku.edu/healthservices) to schedule an appointment and obtain any necessary vaccinations.
Optional Self-Disclosure. We recommend that you disclose any medical conditions or allergies that you have on your WKU Study Abroad Application (Health and Safety: Self-Disclosure Form) and to your on-site coordinator or program leader. This allows us to help you better prepare for your international experience and ensure that the proper support will be in place for you to have a rewarding time abroad. We will maintain strict confidentiality with your health information, sharing only with parties who you have given us permission to share with.

Bringing Medication. If you require prescription medication while abroad, you will need to verify this requirement with a doctor’s note. The note should describe your medical condition(s), prescription medication you require, and the generic names for the medication. You may also need to get it specially notarized or translated into the country’s native language. Bring enough medication to last you a little longer than duration of your international program, packing it in your carry-on in the original containers so that you have it with you at all times. Be sure to note that while some drugs are legal and available in the United States, they may be illegal or unavailable in others. Visit Travel Health Kits for more information on taking prescriptions abroad.

Medical Insurance. All students are required to enroll in international medical insurance during their study abroad program. If you are going on a WKU faculty-led or exchange program or if your program does not include insurance, SAGL will enroll you in an affordable, comprehensive medical insurance plan. It is important that you bring your insurance card with you and that you become familiar with your provider’s health insurance before you leave the country, rather than waiting until you need to use it. Here are some questions you should ask:

- How would I file a claim?
- Do I need to pay up front?
- What is included / excluded?
- What emergency services are provided?
- What health providers can I use?

Safe Food and Water. Find out if water is safe to drink in your destination countries by checking the health conditions on the CDC website. Purify unsafe water before you drink it and make sure water bottles come sealed when you buy them. Ice and tap water can also be unsafe, so be cautious when consuming iced drinks or washed fruits and vegetables. Poor refrigeration, undercooked meat, and roadside/outdoor vendors can also pose problems related to food contamination. If you get diarrhea or food poisoning, remember to drink plenty of fluids in order to stay hydrated. As with all illnesses, seek medical treatment if your condition worsens. Give your body time to adjust to new types of foods.

Staying Healthy. While getting sick is not something you can always avoid, taking care of yourself prior to departure and during your program will help you prevent and fight illness. Get plenty of sleep during the week leading up to your departure. While you are traveling, wash your hands frequently and make sure to stay hydrated. If you do get sick, inform your program coordinator, especially if you feel that medical assistance is necessary.
Safety Abroad

Most U.S. citizens who travel abroad encounter no major differences in safety and crime. That said, there is no place inside or outside of the United States that is completely risk-free. It is recommended that you carefully research the location(s) which you will be visiting to familiarize yourself with current events and safety concerns. Taking simple precautions can go a long way in helping you avoid problems.

Personal Safety Precautions

- Travel in groups even during the daytime. Never walk alone at night. If you do not have someone to accompany you home at night, take a taxi directly to the front door of your residence.
- Be careful when crossing the street. Only cross at designated crosswalks when the pedestrian light is green.
- Avoid neighborhoods and areas where crime is more pervasive.
- Try to blend in—Avoid wearing clothing or acting in ways that pinpoint you as a tourist and/or American, especially in countries with heightened anti-American sentiment.
- Do not take part in protests of any kind.
- Do not engage in potentially dangerous activities such as high-risk sports (i.e. skydiving, bungee jumping, parasailing, white water rafting, surfing, etc.) or get tattoos and body piercings abroad.
- Do not sacrifice safety for cost when making travel arrangements. Use reliable forms of transportation, and stay overnight at accommodations in safe areas of the city.

Preventing Theft. Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Since you are in unfamiliar territory, you should be extra vigilant and maintain a healthy suspicion of strangers. Pickpockets often prey on unsuspecting tourists in crowded areas, sometimes working in groups to create diversions while stealing from them. Be sure to always hold your purse or bag securely under your arm or in your lap when seated. Backpacks should be worn on one shoulder under your arm in crowded areas.

One of the best ways to avoid theft is to not carry unnecessary items that could be stolen (i.e. large quantities of cash, expensive jewelry, electronics, etc.). Leave valuables at home (in the United States) unless you absolutely need them. If you are unsure about whether a laptop is needed, ask your program coordinator. Only take your wallet, passport, and electronics out when you need them, and do not set them down in a public area.

Alcohol Consumption. You will likely be traveling to places where the legal drinking age is lower than in the United States. If you choose to consume alcohol while abroad, do so responsibly, following these guidelines to ensure your personal safety and appropriate behavior.

- Abide by the customs and laws of your host country.
- Abide by the standards of conduct established by your program administrators, even if those rules may be more rigid than the laws of your host country. They are intended to keep you safe.

Tips for Taking Taxis

Never taken a taxi before? Here are a few helpful suggestions!

- Always sit in the back seat unless you are sharing with people you know.
- Do not share taxis with strangers.
- Do not use non-metered or unofficial taxis. If the meter is broken, take a different taxi.
- Know the tipping etiquette.
- Keep the phone number of a reliable taxi company on you in case you get into a situation where you need to call one.
- Be aware of the expectations outlined in the WKU Student Code of Conduct. Behaviors that deviate from these expectations can result in repercussions such as dismissal from your program and/or judicial sanctions.
- Be aware that the effects of alcohol are magnified at higher altitudes and that drinks may be stronger than you are used to.
- Do not become intoxicated, which can impair your judgment and can lead you to engage in inappropriate behavior, become ill, or get into a situation where you are taken advantage of.
- Do not accept drinks from strangers. Always buy your own drinks and keep them with you at all times.
- Never go home with strangers.

Response Guide for Emergencies and Non-Emergency Situations

Emergencies

Fill out your WKU emergency card (provided to you by SAGL in the pre-departure orientation) and keep it with you at all times while abroad, following the communication protocol appropriate for each situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency Contact</th>
<th>Types of Situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Leader / On-Site Coordinator</td>
<td>For most emergencies, the program leader/on-site coordinator should be your FIRST point of contact. Examples of situations: • Getting lost • Failing to meet back with the group at the appropriate time and location • Theft or loss of possessions • Minor or major health issues • Uncomfortable situations which do not involve the program leader/coordinator • Emergency family situations • Any other concerns or issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Emergency Number (Equivalent of 911)</td>
<td>For crises that require immediate assistance, call the local emergency number first. As soon as you have received initial aid, inform your program leader/coordinator of the situation. Examples of situations: • Medical emergencies • Physical danger or assault • Any other situations that would normally require calling 911 in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WKU Emergency Phone (001-270-745-2548)</td>
<td>The WKU Emergency Phone is a resource primarily for WKU faculty-led program leaders but can also be used by students as a last resort in special situations. Examples of situations: • You are unable to get in touch with the program leader/coordinator or obtain assistance otherwise • The emergency involves a situation with a program leader/coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Embassy located nearest to your program location</td>
<td>You should contact the nearest U.S. Embassy only in certain rare and serious situations which require aid from the U.S. Foreign Service in order to be resolved. Examples of situations: • Loss of passport • Arrest or serious legal difficulties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-Emergencies

If you would like to consult with someone regarding a non-emergency situation that you are dealing with while abroad, contact the appropriate person in the Office of Study Abroad & Global Learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Person</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Types of Situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abby Leake, Study Abroad Advisor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Abby.leake@wk.edu">Abby.leake@wk.edu</a></td>
<td>Issues related to exchange programs, Harlaxton, Semester at Sea, and programs in Asia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine Hale, Study Abroad Advisor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Katherine.hale@wk.edu">Katherine.hale@wk.edu</a></td>
<td>Issues related to all other programs in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Craig T. Cobane, Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Craig.cobane@wk.edu">Craig.cobane@wk.edu</a></td>
<td>Serious but non-emergency situations that need to be reported to someone at WKU, such as inappropriate behavior on the part of program leaders or participants, uncomfortable situations, health and safety concerns, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Money Matters

**Budgeting.** To ensure that you have set aside sufficient funds for your international experience, plan a detailed budget well in advance of your departure date utilizing the Financial Planning for Study Abroad worksheet (available in your WKU study abroad application). Research the cost of living in your city and be realistic about how much food and travel will cost so that you do not under-budget. You will also want to familiarize yourself with the currency exchange rate and have a simple way to mentally convert prices to U.S. dollars so that you are always aware of how much you are actually spending.

Be aware that other students’ budgets may be much different than yours. Just because others in your group are spending a lot on souvenirs and independent travel does not mean you have to. Remember that you do not have to spend a lot of money to have a rewarding experience. There is great value in getting well acquainted with the city or country where you are living and making local friends rather than having a “tourist” experience.

**Money Checklist**

- Do I have an ATM card that can be used at my international destination(s)?
- Do I have a back-up card?
- Have I found out what fees will be charged for ATM withdrawals?
- Have I informed my bank and credit card company of my travel dates and destinations?
- Have I obtained enough foreign currency to use the first day or two or do I have U.S. dollars to exchange at the airport?

**Accessing Money While Abroad.** Debit cards and credit cards now make accessing funds while abroad easier than ever. Since ATMs are prevalent in most countries, there should be no need to carry a large quantity of cash with you abroad, and doing so is strongly discouraged. Cash poses a liability for the simple reason that if it is lost or stolen, there is no way to replace it. On the other hand, if a card is lost or stolen, you can cancel it and, in many cases, recover charges that you did not make.

Most people find that using an ATM/debit card is the easiest and most affordable way to access money while abroad. If you are unsure of the availability of ATMs in your program location, consult with your program coordinator. Check with your bank to find out if your ATM card will work in all of the countries to which you are traveling, and find out what fees you will be charged. Ask your bank to note on your account that you will be using it abroad so that they do not “freeze” your card, believing it to have been stolen.
In addition to the ATM card, you will want to have an alternate debit or credit card in case your primary ATM card gets “eaten” by the ATM or gets lost or stolen. Be aware that some credit cards have very high foreign currency transaction fees and may not be a good choice for everyday purchases or cash advances. However, others have no international fees. Verify with your credit card company before using the card abroad.

**How to Exchange Money.** While exchanging cash is not the most cost-effective way to access money, you may exchange currency overseas at international airports, rail stations, banks, large hotels, and travel agencies. Expect to pay some kind of fee for the transaction each time you exchange money. You will need to have your passport with you to present when you exchange money. Be aware that exchange rates constantly fluctuate and vary between locations even on the same day.

**Obtaining Currency in Advance.** You may wish to obtain a small amount of foreign currency before arrival to your host country. There are a few different ways to obtain foreign currency from the United States. If it is a commonly used currency, you can exchange money at a large U.S. bank. The rate, however, will probably not be ideal. An alternative method is to order cash or a foreign currency card that can be pre-loaded and picked up at the international airport or sent to your U.S. residence in advance. For more information, visit the website of the international airport to which you will be arriving.

**Money Do’s and Don’ts**
- Do bring a small amount of foreign currency or U.S. dollars ($75-100) to exchange at the airport upon arrival to your host country to use the first day or two, or obtain some foreign currency in advance.
- Do bring a debit card that works in the countries that you will visit, and have your PIN number memorized.
- Do bring a back-up debit or credit card that will also work at your destination.
- Do inform your bank and credit card companies of your travel dates and destinations and find out foreign currency transaction fees and ATM fees.
- Do not carry all your cash and cards on you in the same place. If your wallet is lost or stolen, you will lose everything at once!
- Do not use traveler’s checks, unless your program coordinator recommends them or you have no alternative back-up.
- Do not carry a large quantity of cash on you (unless there is no safer place to keep the cash). If it is a better deal for you to withdraw the maximum permitted amount at each ATM withdrawal, hide the cash in smaller amounts in your residence (if the place you are staying is secure). Only carry with you what you might need for the day.
- Do not flaunt your money or valuable possessions. Keep larger bills hidden away until you need them, and only take out your wallet when you are at the register purchasing something.

**Staying Connected With People at Home**

There are a number of ways you can communicate with family and friends back home while you are abroad. As you prepare for your international experience, decide the best way for you to communicate and set expectations for yourself. Remember, studying abroad is about encountering other cultures and people; do not miss out on rewarding experiences by spending all your time talking to people back home.

**Internet.** If you will have regular access to a high-speed internet connection, staying in touch through email, social networking sites, blogging, and video chat will probably be sufficient for your communication needs. Programs such as Skype™ and Google Talk allow you to video chat for free with anyone who also has high-speed internet. You can also use those programs to call landline phones and cell phones at very affordable rates.
**International Cell Phone Plan.** You may wish to upgrade to an international cell phone plan that includes texting and/or minutes for calling for the period that you will be overseas. Check with your provider to find out about international plans and costs. Beware that using your cell phone internationally can be very expensive. Watch out for roaming and data charges. Even if you decide not to upgrade, be informed about what you will be charged if you do use your cell phone while abroad so there are no surprises when your bill comes in.

**Local Cell Phone.** If you will be abroad for a semester or longer, you may wish to either purchase a cell phone to use for local calls or to bring an unlocked phone and acquire a local simcard. Be careful not to commit to a plan that you will not be able to get out of at the end of your program. Most study abroad students choose a pre-paid plan, purchasing credit as they need it. As pay-as-you-go credit is usually more expensive, you will want to use your phone primarily for texting and short calls.

**International Calling Cards.** In many countries pay phones are still very prevalent. Using international calling cards can be an affordable way to stay in touch with friends and family in the United States. Pay phones can also be used to make calls locally to communicate with fellow students and newly acquired friends.

**Packing Tips**

Packing for international travel takes a lot of careful planning and advanced preparation. Start packing early. If you wait until the last minute, you are more likely to forget important items, over pack, be disorganized, and feel stressed before departure. The tips below can help you as you prepare your luggage.

- Check your airline’s luggage restrictions to be aware of the limits on size, weight, and number of checked and carry-on bags. Most airlines now charge an additional fee for a second checked bag. Size and weight restrictions vary, but most carriers allow your checked bag to weigh up to 50 pounds.
- Consider bringing one large suitcase with wheels and a day pack. Keep in mind that you may have to walk long distances in airports and in the city to get to your hotel/residence.
- Consider using the Ziplock bag method to maximize luggage space and keep your things neat and organized. Store all your items in gallon-sized Ziplock bags, squeezing out excess air and stacking the bags one on top of the other in your large suitcase.
- Research the climate and check the weather forecast the week before departure to know what to expect. Pack clothing that is appropriate for both the climate and the activities you will be doing.
- Bring the proper adapters and converters. An adapter allows you to fit the plug of your American appliances into a different outlet shape. A converter converts the voltage to the appropriate level for the appliance. Some electronics such as laptops and cellphones have a built-in converter and only require an adapter, while appliances such as hair dryers, straighteners and curling irons may require a converter. Look on the appliance itself to find out the permitted voltage range. Appliances that require a converter may be easier to purchase abroad.
- Leave behind all valuables unless they are absolutely necessary to have with you abroad. If you are unsure of whether you should bring your laptop, ask your program leader/coordinator.
- Bring comfortable walking shoes that you have already broken in.
- Pack light to save room for souvenirs! You may want to bring an empty duffle bag with you to use as a carry-on for extra luggage.
- If you are staying with a host family, bring a small gift that represents your state or WKU.
- Pack an additional set or two of clothing in your carry-on in case your checked bag does not arrive with you to your final destination.
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- Make sure that any liquids or gels are in containers that are 3.4 ounces or smaller and those containers are in a 1 quart-size plastic bag. See 3-1-1 rule for carry-ons.
- Do not pack sharp objects (scissors, Swiss army knives, tweezers, etc.) in your carry-on. They will be confiscated. See prohibited items.
- If you are on prescription medication, bring enough to last a little longer than the duration of your program, just in case. Pack it in your carry-on to keep it with you.
- Check the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website for updated info on airport travel security a week or two before departure.

Additional packing resources:
- http://www.smartpacking.com/

Cultural Preparation

You will encounter numerous cultural differences as you are traveling and living abroad. Some may be immediately evident; others may take time to pick up on. You will experience an easier transition and will have a more enriching experience if you prepare by researching your destination in advance.

What to Find Out
- Basic facts about the country and people
  - Political leaders and current political climate
  - Important dates and figures in the country’s history
  - Current events
  - Predominant religion(s) and their importance in everyday life
  - Languages spoken
  - Important holidays and how they are celebrated
- Etiquette for greeting, dining, and tipping
- Social norms for dress, eating schedules, drinking, dating, everyday social interactions, etc.
- Taboos or culturally inappropriate behaviors
- Differences in gender roles and perceptions of men and women
- Popular cuisine
- Popular music
- Common perceptions of Americans and the United States
- Laws (legal age for drinking, traffic laws, illegal drugs, public conduct, etc.)

Resources for Cultural Information
- Country Handbooks http://www.studentsabroad.com/
- U.S. Department of State Information for Students Abroad http://studentsabroad.state.gov/
- Culture Crossing http://www.culturecrossing.net/
- Lonely Planet http://www.lonelyplanet.com/
- DK Eyewitness Travel http://www.dktripplanner.com/

Culture Shock. Sometimes, despite their preparation, people find themselves in their host country feeling homesick, bored or withdrawn. They might spend all their time with Americans, avoiding the host nationals.
They may drink, eat, or sleep too much. They might feel hostile or critical of the host culture. They are experiencing what many people refer to as culture shock.

Culture shock is used to describe some of these more pronounced reactions to spending an extended period of time in a culture very different from your own. Not everyone will experience culture shock. But for those of you who do, it is helpful to be able to recognize culture shock when it occurs, so you can take appropriate action.

**Stages of Culture Shock.** Adjustment to a new culture tends to occur in stages. Initially, there is a honeymoon phase. You are in a new country, and everything is exhilarating and exciting. Perhaps you're involved in a flurry of orientation, getting settled, and getting hosted around the town or city. The sights, sounds and tastes are all a new adventure. And, at first, you may even see more of the similarities between your host country and the U.S. than the differences.

However, after some time, you realize that things aren't the same. Maybe you are tired of the food or struggling with the language. Maybe the university seems incomprehensible and bureaucratic. Maybe you are tired of long commutes whenever you need to go somewhere. Maybe everything is much more expensive than you anticipated. Or perhaps things are less expensive, but not of the quality or variety you appreciate at home. Your initial enthusiasm has drifted away and you have entered the stage of irritability and hostility. Worse, you may just feel like you don't really belong.

Be patient. Almost always, these symptoms disappear with time and you will experience a stage of gradual adjustment. Your sense of humor will reappear. Things which seemed strange or just inconvenient will gradually become familiar.

Lastly, there is the stage of adaptation or biculturalism. You have finally arrived. You have managed to retain your own cultural identity but recognize the right of other cultures to retain theirs. You have a better understanding of yourself and others, and you can communicate easily and convey warmth and understanding across the cultural barriers.

There is no one way to experience culture shock. It may be acute or barely noticeable. You may find it returns once after you thought you had already passed through all the stages. If you are experiencing the irritability and hostility associated with culture shock, there are positive steps you can take and the sooner you take them, the better.

**Culture Shock Do's and Don'ts**

- Do be aware that culture shock exists, one way or another, and it will not last forever.
- **Do not** sit around being critical and negative.
- Do plan fun things to do!
- **Do not** focus on bad things.
- Do set goals for yourself.
- Do look for the best in your situation.
- Do enjoy the diversity of people and cultures.
Do not be judgmental.
Do keep a journal.
Do not think of yourself as strange and abnormal.
Do not be offended by characteristics of the culture which are not polite or appropriate in the U.S.
Do try to stay busy.
Do not immediately call/write/e-mail your family/friends to tell them how miserable you are.

Remember that culture shock can be a very valuable experience, which can leave you with broader perspectives, deeper insight into yourself, and a wider tolerance for other people.

**Student Conduct Abroad**

Keep in mind that you are a representative of WKU and of the United States while abroad; as such, your behavior will reflect upon WKU and will impact the way people view Americans. You are expected to adhere to the [WKU Student Code of Conduct](#) at all times, both inside and outside of the classroom. Misconduct of any kind can lead to dismissal from your program and/or university-imposed judicial sanctions. Furthermore, any infractions committed abroad will be recorded on your judicial record at WKU.

**Examples of Misconduct**
- Academic dishonesty
- Use or possession of illegal drugs
- Violation of local laws such as those governing alcohol consumption
- Violation of program rules
- Sexual misconduct
- Possession of weapons
- Theft, misuse or destruction of property
- Harassment
- Unruly behavior
- Failure to attend class or disruptive classroom behavior

**Dating and Sexual Boundaries.** Before pursuing any kind of romantic relationship while abroad, it is important to familiarize yourself with the differences in cultural values, gender roles, and social norms for relationships in your host country. Be aware that the way you dress, act, and communicate could be interpreted much differently in the cultural context of your host country. It is especially important for women to be aware of the stereotypes of American women that exist in many countries. As a result of American movies and TV shows, many people in other countries assume that many American women are “easy” and willing to become sexually intimate upon short acquaintance. Be careful that your attire and conduct does not send unintentional signals. Create healthy boundaries for yourself in advance. Before entering into a romantic relationship, consider the implications of your actions and the potential complications. Do not do something you will regret!

**Need more information?** We are here to help you! If after reviewing this information you would like more guidance or more information on any of these topics or others, do not hesitate to contact your Study Abroad Advisor. For questions regarding the study abroad application, email studyabroadapp@WKU.edu

WKU Study Abroad and Global Learning wishes you safe travels and a pleasant journey From the Hilltop to the World®!