

# UVA Education Abroad

*A Division of the International Studies Office*

## Handbook



UNIVERSITY  
*of* VIRGINIA

EDUCATION  
ABROAD

Dear UVA Student and Family:

Study abroad will inevitably be one of the most exciting opportunities in your (or your student's) academic life. It is a time filled with learning, observing, practicing new skills, and forming new relationships.

Use this handbook as a reference to help you learn about key topics as you consider and prepare for time abroad, including academic credit, passports and other travel documents, and cultural adjustment.

We also encourage you to do independent research about your host country!

Characteristics that play a vital role in your success abroad are: flexibility, adaptability, a sense of responsibility, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of humor. Not sure you have all of those? Education abroad is a great opportunity to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help you now and later in life.

We also challenge you to be goodwill ambassadors whether in the classroom or on a train, in a restaurant or with new friends. Take every opportunity to open your mind to new experiences, customs, and people. Remember: you are a guest in another country, so the utmost respect and appreciation should be evident in your words and actions.

Be safe, learn from every situation, enjoy the journey, and know that we are here to support you!

The Education Abroad Team at the International Studies Office

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## Academics

Education abroad is about education - in the classroom and outside. Here are some academic matters to consider, from securing course approvals to what you may experience in class, to registering for next semester's courses while abroad.

### Academic Culture

One of the exciting aspects of education abroad is the opportunity to study a subject in a different environment. Through education abroad, you can learn about new perspectives, access new resources, and develop new academic skills. The academic culture you experience abroad will be different than here on Grounds – and that's not only okay, but it's also part of the reason to study abroad in the first place!

Even students on UVA faculty-led programs will find that their academic experience is different because the traditional classroom-based model of learning is often replaced with or supplemented with on-site learning.

If you're participating in an exchange or attending a host university, you will have the opportunity to learn about and take part in a different educational system. This may require a bit of "relearning" on your part, as you discover new teaching styles and are expected to perform according to a new set of standards.

Depending on the type of program you are in, the way your academic culture is different will vary:

- Students enrolling in a local university may find that syllabi are structured more like bibliographies with students expected to do a lot of independent reading and learning outside of class time (throughout the semester - not just before the exam).
- In some academic cultures, classes are almost entirely lecture-based, with less interactive discussion than you may be used to. You may be expected to take (and review) extensive notes instead. You must attend class regularly, even if attendance isn't taken.
- Instead of testing your knowledge in class with small tests or quizzes, you may be expected to approach the professor or tutor if you have questions and be graded on only one large exam or assignment.
- Grading scales may be more strictly adhered to (students in France aren't used to straight A's!). Some countries in East Asia (for example) use strict grading curves; only a few students get a top grade. Refer to the Transferring Credit section for the minimum equivalent grade you must receive for credit to transfer back to UVA.
- If you're doing fieldwork, research, or an internship, you may spend more time out of the classroom, working in small groups.

Some **strategies for academic success** include:

- Research the academic culture of your program or host institution. Learn about writing conventions, reference requirements in your field, teaching styles, etc. Consider connecting with a returnee for a student perspective on the academic culture in your host country.

- Consider your needs. If you receive extra time on exams, work with notetakers, etc., contact SDAC and your program or host institution well in advance of the start of the term. We encourage you to begin the conversation within a week of committing to your program. The procedure and timeline for securing these accommodations may differ from what you're used to. Not all programs or institutions are able to provide the same exact accommodations you receive at UVA.
- Don't overdo it. Remember that you need to earn at least 12 US credits per semester to maintain full-time enrollment (6 for summer). Don't be tempted to overload on classes and related experiences since you'll be adjusting to a new academic culture (there might be financial implications, too!).
- Pay attention to other students. Is everyone else taking notes? Is the local café empty because everyone is in the library, studying? If you are taking classes alongside local students, take cues about study habits from those around you.
- Review course syllabi. Be sure to read each course syllabus thoroughly so you understand how much each assignment or exam impacts your final grade. In some countries/institutions your grade is based entirely on the final exam rather than factoring in assignments throughout the semester.
- Use resources available to you. You know how to be a successful student at UVA, but you won't immediately know the different academic expectations at your host institution. Use academic support resources at your host institution early in the semester so you can learn and adapt before bigger assignments are due.
- Ask for help. Check in with your professor or instructor, use the writing center if one is available, and ask questions.

## Course Approvals, Credits, and Registration: UVA Students

The type of credit you receive will vary based on the type of program you select. Programs can offer **Direct Credit** (awarded by UVA), **Transfer Credit** (awarded by another institution), or a combination of the two.

- Not sure which type of credit the program you are considering will offer? Find your program(s) in the [Program Search](#), click on the program name, then scroll to the Fact Sheet or Information Sheet and look at the Credit Type field.
- Do the grades get factored into my GPA? How can I use the credit? How do I secure the appropriate approvals? Find answers to these and other questions on our website's [Academic Considerations page](#).

### Direct Credit

UVA students participating in a Direct Credit program do not have a formal pre-approval process; courses and grades will be posted to your UVA record. However, if you plan on using the course credits toward any degree or area requirements, confirm with your department/s or school ahead of time that the courses will indeed count as you intend.

## Transfer Credit

If you are participating in a Transfer Credit program, you must get courses pre-approved as part of your UVA application for the program. The Study Abroad Transfer Credit Approval Form is unique to each school; applicants access the form and instructions for their school upon opening a UVA application. Students on Combo Credit programs must secure approval for any transfer credit courses.

Should your course enrollment change upon arrival abroad, **do not wait until you return from abroad to obtain new approvals**. You can secure new approvals while abroad; instructions for doing so are available in your Transfer Credit Approval Form's instructions. You are responsible for obtaining approvals and for saving all related correspondence. Follow the steps below as you select your new course(s):

### Steps for College students:

1. For elective credit, email the Transfer Credit Evaluators at [collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu](mailto:collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu). Consult the study abroad [Transfer Credit Equivalency database](#) to see if your new course has previously been approved. If you are unable to find the course in the elective database, include a description of the course in your email to the Transfer Credit Evaluators.
2. For major/minor or foreign language credit, email a course description and/or syllabus to both the [departmental director](#) and the Transfer Credit Evaluators ([collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu](mailto:collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu)). Once obtained, forward the departmental director's approval of a substitute major/minor or foreign language course to the Evaluators.

### Steps for students in other schools:

1. E-mail the course syllabus to the appropriate academic department in your School.
2. Once you have departmental approval, forward the email approval to your School Registrar. In your email, include your name, host institution, classes you're taking abroad, and the UVA equivalent course number and title approved by your department.

**Save all approval emails in case they are needed later.**

For transfer credits to be posted to your UVA record after the program concludes, all courses must be pre-approved. You must also earn the minimum transfer grade or better for the credits to transfer:

- College, Batten, Commerce, Education, Engineering: C
- Architecture, Nursing: C-

In addition to the Transfer Credit form, your school will also need your official transcript from the program. Your transcript must be sent by your host institution or program to your school directly. PDFs sent by email are not accepted. It is your responsibility to request that an official transcript be sent as follows:

- **Students in the College** should have transcripts sent to:  
Abigail Holeman, Transfer Credit Evaluator

PO Box 400133  
 University of Virginia  
 Charlottesville, VA 22904-4133  
 Email: [collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu](mailto:collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu)

- **Students in other schools** should have transcripts sent to the registrar, as listed on the School's Transfer Credit Approval Form.

Transcripts are usually sent 2 to 3 months after a program has ended – in other words, don't expect to participate in a spring semester program and graduate that same May! Make sure you know how to request official transcripts from the program or host institution in the future, in case you need them for graduate school applications, etc.

Once a transcript is received, the credits you earned will be listed on your transcript as “credit received” in accordance with your transfer credit approvals. Your transcript must match your transfer credit approval forms for your credit to be processed. **Grades for transfer credit courses do not appear on your UVA transcript, and they are not factored into your UVA GPA**, but be mindful that others may see them in the future when you apply to graduate school or other advanced degree programs. An example of what a transcript looks like for a transfer credit program is available at the bottom of our [Registration and Billing page](#).

The Dean's Office in your School of Enrollment has the final authority on the number of credits you will receive, thus if the number of course credits is in question, be sure to communicate directly with the School Registrar/Transfer of Credit Evaluator.

## Program Registration

Clicking the “commit” button on your UVA education abroad application confirms your participation in a study abroad program. You must commit to the program and make sure you don't have holds on your SIS account to facilitate the course registration outlined below.

**For all study abroad programs:** The ISO will register you into a course titled ZFOR 35XX, 45XX or 55XX International Study. In addition to maintaining your UVA enrollment for the term, allowing you to be billed appropriately, and facilitating the use of financial aid, this registration adds a note to your academic transcript documenting your study abroad experience. **You cannot register yourself for the ZFOR and in most cases you should not register for courses on grounds for the term in which you will be abroad (unless you plan on taking a summer course on-Grounds before or after a summer study abroad program).**

**For study abroad programs with direct credit:** In addition to the ZFOR course, the ISO will register you in your direct credit content courses (for example: ENGL XXXX). You should not try to enroll yourself in the study abroad direct credit content courses; the ISO will complete this for you.

## Registering for Next Semester's Classes

If you're abroad for a semester or year, you will most likely be abroad when registration opens for your next semester on Grounds in November or March. You will still enroll in courses in SIS as usual (just note the time difference!), but make sure you don't have any holds (UREG will ensure you don't



have an Advisor hold), and that you're able to successfully log into SIS, *before* your actual enrollment open date.

See the Communication & Social Media section of this handbook for important information about accessing NetBadge-protected sites using the 2-Step Login from abroad.

Follow these steps when registering:

1. Log into SIS before the enrollment period to 1) make sure you're able to access the system, 2) view your enrollment appointment date and time, and 3) check for holds. UREG will ensure you don't have an Advisor Hold, but you are responsible for clearing any other holds.
2. Notify your advisor that you are abroad so that you can conduct advising over email if necessary.
3. When it's time, log in to SIS and enroll in courses in the usual fashion. Your registration time will not be affected by the fact that you're abroad.
4. If your appointment time is particularly inconvenient due to time difference or lack of internet access, you may send a list of courses (with alternates) to UREG at [ureg@virginia.edu](mailto:ureg@virginia.edu). They will attempt to enroll you, but only during business hours (M-F, 8am-5pm EST) and not necessarily as quickly as you would yourself. **Only use this as a last resort if you really can't enroll yourself in a timely fashion.**

## Course Approvals, Credits, and Registration: Non-UVA Students

If you are participating in a UVA program, get your courses pre-approved at your home school as part of the application to the program. As part of your UVA education abroad application, you must secure approval from your home school and submit the Approval of Participation Form to the International Studies Office.

Clicking the "commit" button on your UVA education abroad application confirms your participation in a UVA study abroad program. You must commit to the program to facilitate the course registration outlined below.

After your commitment is completed, the ISO will register you as a visiting, non-degree seeking student at UVA, in the UVA Student Information System (SIS). You will then be placed into a course titled ZFOR 35XX or 55XX International Study. This course allows you to be billed appropriately and adds a note to your UVA transcript indicating that you were abroad. You will also be registered for the UVA study abroad content courses (for example: ENGL XXXX).

Should your course enrollment change upon arrival abroad, follow your home school's procedure for obtaining course approval; many schools require students to reach out to secure approval as soon as possible should course enrollment change after arrival.

If you're abroad in the fall or spring semester, you'll be registering for the following semester's courses while you're abroad. Be sure you are clear as to what you will have to do in order to register at your home institution.

Transcripts are usually sent 2 to 3 months after a program has ended. They will be sent to the address you listed on your Approval of Participation form.

## Steps for Success: Academics

### Before You Go

- ☐ Secure course approvals, if applicable.
- ☐ Commit to the program and make sure you don't have holds on your SIS account.
- ☐ Research the academic culture of your program or host institution.
- ☐ Check SIS to make sure you are registered in a ZFOR for the term(s) you are abroad, and content classes if you are on a direct credit program.

### While You're Abroad

- ☐ Secure appropriate approvals for any course changes, if you're on a transfer or combo credit program.
- ☐ Check in with yourself and with your professors about your academic progress; use resources available through the program or institution for support as necessary.
- ☐ Prepare to register for next semester's classes, if applicable: make sure you can log in to SIS from abroad, contact your academic advisor, and confirm your registration time.
- ☐ Register for next semester's classes, if applicable.

### Upon Return

- ☐ If receiving transfer credit, request a transcript be sent to the person or office listed on your Transfer Credit Approval Form, if applicable. (UVA students)
- ☐ Make sure you have paid all fees and cleared any holds on your UVA SIS account. (Non-UVA students)
- ☐ Make sure your transcript has been received by the person or office listed on your Approval of Participation Form. (Non-UVA students)

## Finances

### Cost, Billing, & Payments

#### Cost

What does education abroad cost? As with a term on Grounds, you will have a total Cost of Attendance: a combination of billable plus other expenses (commonly including items like airfare, personal expenses, and meals not included in the billable fees). What that cost will be, who you pay, and where to find the information about your program varies by type:

- **UVA programs = Program Tuition & Fees + Non-billable expenses**  
Consult the Costs and Finances tab at the top of the program page.
- **Exchange programs = UVA Tuition & Fees + Other expenses**  
Consult [SFS](#) for your UVA Tuition + Fee rates. A list of the types of expenses to expect plus

links to the host institution website are on the program page. Housing will be paid to the host institution or privately, depending on your host's housing options.

→ **Outside programs = Program Tuition & Fees + \$500 Study Abroad Admin Fee + Other expenses**

Program Tuition & Fees and estimates of non-billable expenses can be found on program provider or host institution websites. Information about the UVA \$500 Study Abroad Admin Fee is found on our [Fees, Billing, and Payments page](#).

As with all things, there are exceptions in certain cases! Look carefully at the Fact Sheet or Information Sheet (particularly the "Tuition Payments Made To" and "Admin Fee" fields), Costs and Finances tab (if available), and information on the rest of the program page for details about your program's costs.

Not sure how to find the program page on our website? Use the [Program Search](#) and click on the program name to access the relevant page.

You are additionally advised to have access to a 2-week emergency fund in reserve for unexpected scenarios.

## Billing & Payments

University of Virginia fees will be posted to student accounts upon registration. UVA bills may be paid through SIS according to the due dates on your student account.

Fees billed to you by an outside program or from a host institution are paid by you directly to the program provider or host institution.

## Financial Resources

### Paying with Financial Aid

If you use financial aid at UVA, depending on your program, you may be asked by Student Financial Services to submit an Education Abroad Expense Form documenting program costs, as well as a Consortium Agreement for disbursement of funds. Once reviewed, your financial aid award will be made available to you in the Finances section of your SIS account. At the time your financial aid review is complete, you should receive an email message from SFS instructing you how to access the details of your award.

If you do receive a scholarship or financial aid for your program, be aware that financial aid (and scholarships) disburses based on program start date and UVA's existing disbursement schedule. You are responsible for paying the balance of billable fees not covered by aid or scholarships you receive. Students are strongly encouraged to set up direct deposit and Power of Attorney to facilitate immediate access to your refund, if applicable. Information about paying with financial aid on outside programs is available on the [Student Financial Services website](#).

## Pre-Travel Advance

Airfare, visas, and immunizations are just some of the expenses that you may have to pay for before a study abroad program begins. Students waiting for financial aid to disburse or for whom providing the funds upfront is otherwise a hardship may consider the Pre-Travel Advance. Talk to your Education Abroad Advisor about this option to secure a loan of up to \$2,500 at the time that you need it as you prepare to travel. See our [Additional Financial Resources](#) page for details.

## 529 College Savings & State Prepaid Tuition Programs

If you use Tuition Management, Virginia Pre-Paid Tuition plans, 529 plans or similar, contact your plan provider to learn how or whether those funds/plans can be used to pay for your education abroad program. Consult the [529 College Savings Plan & State Prepaid Tuition Plans website](#) for details.

### Additional Resources:

- [Fees, Billing, & Payment](#)
- [Cost Comparison Worksheet](#)
- [Financial Aid Process](#)
- [Using Financial Aid to Pay for Study Abroad](#)
- [Scholarships](#)
- [Additional Financial Resources](#)

*Questions regarding financial aid should be directed to Student Financial Services at (434) 982-6000*

## Steps for Success: Finances

### Before You Go

- ☐ Understand the total expected cost to participate in your education abroad program.
- ☐ Understand what fees are paid to whom (UVA, program provider, airline, etc.) and when.
- ☐ Review existing resources and identify what can be used for education abroad.
- ☐ Submit any additional documentation required for financial aid review.
- ☐ Research and apply for additional scholarships and financial resources specifically for education abroad (understanding that some deadlines may be earlier than your program's deadline).
- ☐ Understand disbursement timelines for financial aid and scholarships.
- ☐ Set up direct deposit and Power of Attorney, if applicable for financial aid.
- ☐ Pay billable fees by their deadline, and/or confirm arrangements for financial aid/scholarships to cover billable fees.

## Daily Life

Make sure that you are also referencing information shared with you by your UVA Education Abroad Advisor (UVA programs), or your program provider or host institution (Exchange and Outside programs), as they will provide more specific details about your host community.

### Money Matters

General money management best practices:

- Make a budget based on the expected costs of your program and location – and stick to it!
- Understand how money works in your host location – is it a cash economy or will you get by with cards? Is there a tipping culture?
- Use your program or host institution's resources to help you plan, plus dependable sources like travel guides and sites.

### Cash

Have a plan for accessing cash regularly while overseas (especially if you're going to a place where buying a small coffee with a credit card is frowned upon!).

Things to consider:

- In most cases, you can plan to withdrawal cash at an ATM at the airport when you arrive but have a plan in place in case it doesn't work. (Also be aware that the fees and rates at some airport ATMs may be higher than at ATMs outside of the airport.)
- For that reason (and others), it's helpful to travel with some US dollars (\$50 or so) if you are traveling to a country where cash is required or preferred. Airport exchange desks are another option, though their rates are often a bit higher.
- You may be able to purchase the host country currency at your US bank before departure (to get by for the first day or so) – but some currencies can't be purchased outside of the country.
- Exchange rates fluctuate daily; you can find them online (at sites like [xe.com](http://xe.com)) or at local exchange services.
- Carry only the amount of cash you need daily; consider a money belt; secure any additional cash in your accommodation.

Things to know:

- What is your host country's currency?
- What is an ATM called in your host country, and where are they located?
- What is a typical exchange rate?
- Will you be expected to make most purchases using cash?

## Debit & Credit Cards

Plan to bring a debit and credit card with you – it is important to have multiple ways of accessing funds. Things to know and do:

- Debit cards with Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus or Plus signs are the most widely accepted cards: check the back of your debit card to see which yours has.
- Transactions will be posted to your account at that day's exchange rate. There are usually transaction fees, and the fees vary significantly.
- Contact your bank and credit card company before traveling to:
  - Alert them of the date and location(s) of your travels (you don't want your card to get shut off when you attempt your first transaction!). This can often be done online through the bank/credit card company's website.
  - Find out the fees charged for each transaction. For your debit card, find out if your bank has any "partner banks" in your host location as they may provide reduced or waived fees.
- If your credit card has a chip, make sure you know the PIN; your credit card company can set one up for you, or you may be able to select one yourself.
- Make copies of both the front and back of the card and know the country-specific customer service phone number to assist you should the card be lost or stolen. Keep a set securely at home with family, and a set (away from the actual cards) with your important documents.
- Be prepared to provide a credit card for incidentals when checking in to a hotel, even if it is being paid for by your program or another party.
- Do not carry your cards with your phone in case your phone is stolen or lost.

## Opening a Bank Account

If you are abroad for a semester or year, it may be advisable for you to open a local bank account. Your program should provide guidance (including what documentation you may need to bring with you) if that is the case.

## Communications & Social Media

Regardless of where you are studying, your communication patterns will likely change. Take the following into consideration when making your communication plan (and don't forget to check in with your family once you arrive so they know you made it!).

### Telephone

It is important that you be able to call local numbers in your host country in case you need to contact program staff, emergency services, taxi services, etc. You also may want to be able to call home. Options include:

- For local calling: check with your program to see if they provide a local phone. If not, you can either unlock your U.S. phone and purchase a local SIM card (check with your carrier to confirm, and for fees), or purchase a local phone on arrival. Depending on your phone, you may need to purchase an e-SIM instead of a SIM card.

- For calling home: use your U.S. phone (again, check with your carrier to confirm this is an option, and make sure you understand the fees involved!), activate Wi-Fi calling (if available on your phone), use international calling cards with a local phone, or connect online through an app like Zoom or WhatsApp (confirm your internet connectivity in-country will support this).

## Email/UVA Services

You must continue checking your UVA email account (even if you're a non-UVA student!) while you are abroad. UVA email is the official form of communication at UVA and the means by which the University will notify you of important information. You will also need to access UVA sites, like SIS, while abroad.

There are two options for using the Duo Mobile app internationally. First, if you can connect to a Wi-Fi network, then you can still receive a “push” from the Duo Mobile App without using your cellular network/data plan. Second, if you do not have access to a Wi-Fi connection or cellular network/data plan, then see directions on the [ITS website](#) for using the app without a data plan or a Wi-Fi connection.

## Mail

Find out from your program/host institution where mail should be delivered to you while abroad. Make sure that anyone who sends you packages from the U.S. knows they'll need to fill out a customs form, and that some items are prohibited by carrier and by your host country.

## Social Media

Think about how you use social media now, and how that may change abroad. Certain platforms can be helpful for staying connected to friends and family at home, and for sharing your experience with others. However, you want to be careful about spending so much time communicating with others at home that you miss out on your time abroad!

## Internet

Even if you will have internet in your housing, program center, or on your host university campus, the speed of the connection and capacity for downloading or streaming high volumes of data (like movies, large documents, etc.) may be significantly less than you are used to. That's OK! Consider it an opportunity to connect more with the people around you and supplement your internet-based academic research with texts from university or local libraries.

## Housing & Food

### Housing

Housing for education abroad can be with a host family, in a dorm, in a private apartment with other students, or in a hotel. The type of housing will invariably require you to adapt, either in adjusting to fitting into a family's lifestyle or learning how to navigate living in an apartment with other international or local students. Consider your individual housing needs and communicate with your

program if you need specific parameters for your health (i.e.: access to a refrigerator for storing medicine or air conditioning to prevent asthma attacks).

Not sure what type of housing is right for you? If your program has options, they will provide details about the various types and instructions if you are able to request or rank preferences. Articles like [this one from Go Abroad.com](#) can help you identify general characteristics, but housing is very specific to a location, so always defer to your program for specifics!

## Food

"If I'm an advocate for anything, it's to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. Walk in someone else's shoes or at least eat their food. It's a plus for everybody." - Anthony Bourdain

One of the first ways that people interact with another culture is often through its cuisine. Whether you're off to France or Thailand or another country known for its culinary traditions, or a location where food isn't the first thing you think of (what is South African cuisine?), you will have the opportunity to explore your host culture through its food and related customs. Some "food" for thought:

- Research what foods are common in your host culture, as well as mealtime customs. Is it polite to finish your food, or leave a little bit? When are meals usually served? If you're in a homestay or living with local students, these can be good topics of conversation as you get to know each other.
- Understand the meal arrangements for your program. If you are in a homestay, what meals are provided, and do you have access to the family kitchen to prepare others? If you're in an apartment, what are your kitchen facilities? If you have a meal plan, is the dining hall open 24/7 or only at set times?
- Also understand that, just like in the U.S., food won't be homogenous in your host country: in China, for example, there are multiple types of cuisine throughout the country, and they may not have much in common with the food you get at your local Chinese takeout in the U.S.
- **If you have food allergies or dietary restrictions based on medical or religious grounds**, pay extra attention when researching the cuisine. How likely are you to encounter the food(s)? What alternatives are available? What happens if you have a reaction, what is your on-site plan for managing the reaction, and is there medication you need to bring with you?
  - Make sure your program knows about your allergies or restrictions, as well as anyone preparing your food (a host parent, etc.).
  - If you're traveling to a non-English-speaking country, learn how to say the foods you are allergic to and pay careful attention to vocabulary around food: does that word for "meat" mean all meats, or just red meat? etc.
- **If you have dietary preferences**, also pay attention when researching the cuisine. Additionally, think about how you will approach food during your time abroad and the role food plays in your host community. Will you be refusing food that is a key staple in the local cuisine, or that your hosts would have gone through significant trouble or expense to prepare? Or are you studying somewhere with a wide range of meal options (or the ability for you to cook your own food) that would allow you to continue with your current eating habits? When you



disclose your preferences to your program, make sure to indicate whether you are willing/open to being flexible or not (if everyone at a group meal gets a prosciutto appetizer at dinner and you get cheese, will you want what everyone else has, or will you appreciate being given the special meal to accommodate your preferences?).

## Alcohol & Other Substances

Here in the U.S., chances are you already understand what is **legal**, what is **socially acceptable**, and you've observed **actual behavior** regarding alcohol and drug use. While you are abroad, you will be expected to have the same understanding, but without the benefit of the time you've had here to understand the local context. So, what can you do?

- **Know the alcohol and other drug laws for countries you will visit**, starting with the [Department of State](#), [U.S. Consulates](#), and your program or host institution as resources. For example, each of India's states has independent regulations concerning alcohol purchase and consumption. Legal drinking ages range from 18-25 and can vary by beverage type. Penalties for violation can be harsh.
- If consumption of alcohol is prohibited in your host country (or even in countries through which you have a connecting flight), you may need to abstain from drinking even while in transit to your host location.
- **Understand what is socially acceptable**; research now but expect to learn more during your program orientation, from your host family/roommates, etc. Observe your local peers (responsible ones) once in-country. What do you see? As an example of social acceptability, in Spain you may see people drinking a brandy with their coffee at breakfast, or a glass of wine with lunch, but it is never socially acceptable to be drunk.

**Think about your own substance usage** using the CAGE Questionnaire from the American Psychiatric Association:

- Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?
- Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking or drug use?
- Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking or drug use?
- Have you ever had a drink or used drugs first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

Scoring: Each "yes" answer is one point. For alcohol use, a score of 2 or higher is considered clinically significant by the APA.

Concerned about your CAGE score? Visit the UVA [Student Health's Office of Health Promotion website](#) for campus resources.

Fake alcohol is appearing in different places around the world, including the U.S., Russia, Italy, Mexico, China, Vietnam, Nigeria, and others. Fake alcohol can lead to blackouts, victimization, and death. [Learn how to recognize fake alcohol](#). (Note that this article is intended for UK audiences, but the definition, risks, and most of the tips for recognizing are still valid for travelers to other countries.)

Above all, remember the following:

- If you engage in illegal activities related to drugs, alcohol, or other substances (including prescription medication), your status as a foreigner does not protect you from the consequences of your actions (in fact you may have more, including a revocation of your visa status). **Your U.S. (or other) passport is not a get-out-of-jail-free card.**
- It is perfectly normal to go abroad and abstain from alcohol use - in fact, in some countries, consumption of alcohol is prohibited or strongly discouraged. If you do choose to drink, understand that your tolerance will be disrupted by your change in location, making an overdose more likely. Additionally, alcohol strengths, serving sizes, and types may vary abroad, and being in an unfamiliar environment puts you at greater risk. **Take it easy!**
- Over 90% of UVA students believe it is their responsibility to intervene when they notice a problem situation. Take this behavior with you when you go abroad, and make sure you **know the local equivalent of 911** in case you need to call for help.

The University of Virginia does not condone the illegal or otherwise irresponsible use of alcohol and other drugs. It is the responsibility of every member of the University community to know the risks associated with substance use and abuse. This responsibility obligates students to know relevant policies and laws and to conduct themselves in accordance with these laws and policies. Visit the [Gordie Center for Substance Abuse Prevention](#) and the [Office of Health Promotion](#) for additional policies, resources, and support.

## Relationships

The relationships we have, with family, friends, and significant others, play a key role in our daily lives. When we are in our home community or culture, we have the benefit of a lifetime of experience understanding contextual cues about the relationships around us (are those two people holding hands likely a romantic couple, or just friends?). Even then, missteps occur when we misread the intentions of others. Now you're about to go somewhere new, without the contextual cues to know what it means if a classmate suggests you go out to dinner, or someone on the street tries to engage you in conversation.

Take time to understand what is **socially acceptable** and **legal** regarding interpersonal relationships in your host country ([consider this student's experience and perceptions in his host country](#)). Resources may include materials from your program or host institution, your on-site orientation, program staff or host family, the [Student Identity page](#), and through online research (make sure the source is trustworthy).

If you anticipate being sexually active, take health precautions to [prevent HIV](#) and other [sexually transmitted diseases](#) (including packing contraceptives, especially if they are not as available on-site), and be aware of the social implications (for yourself and for your partner) in your host society.

## Working Abroad

As you will be participating in an academic program, you should take full advantage of the opportunity to study, immerse yourself in your host society, and, to a reasonable extent, travel. You will also need time to adjust to changes in your daily life and studies. Carefully evaluate your needs

and availability when considering working during your study abroad program. If you are interested in working while abroad either in-person or remotely, consult the Consulate for regulations pertaining to working as a foreigner. In some countries, students can work a limited number of hours; in others, you might need a different kind of work permit/visa; in others still, working, including working remotely, may be strictly prohibited. If interested in working remotely while abroad, also consult your employer as they may have policy about this. In all cases, ensure that you understand the host-country and US tax requirements for income earned abroad. Your program provider or host institution may also be able to assist with your enquiry.

## Taking Care of Things at Home while Abroad

Life at home won't stop here while you're away! Make sure that you're staying on top of things that will be happening at home, including checking your home school and UVA email regularly for any updates from the ISO and the University community.

Semester and Year students may also have to manage:

- **Financial Aid Applications:** Spring semester students who need to file a FAFSA for the following academic year should do so before they depart the U.S. Full year students will need to apply from abroad. SFS provides [information about applying for financial aid](#).
- **Taxes:** Spring semester and full year students should plan for doing your taxes either before you leave (spring students) or in collaboration with your parents/guardians.
- **Elections:** Fall semester and full year students especially should take time before you depart to find out what elections will occur while you are abroad and make arrangements for absentee voting. **Remember, 2024 is a Presidential Election year!**
  - Depending on your travel dates, the election dates, and your state's voting guidelines, you may be able to apply in-person before you depart.
  - If you do need to vote absentee, see the [US Federal Voting Assistance Program](#) for information and instructions. Note that you will likely need to pay to mail your ballot back to the US.

## Sustainability

Study abroad not only impacts students but also host cities, families, communities, and the environment. From carbon emissions due to air travel to single-use plastics to what we buy, the choices we make can have positive or negative short and long-term consequences for our home and host communities.

- What can you do to support your host country, host community, and planet while you are studying abroad?
- How can you begin or continue your commitment to sustainability while studying abroad?

We hope these resources below and our [Sustainability and Education Abroad webpage](#) are helpful starting points as you explore these questions.

## Sustainable Travel

Our choices and actions every day directly relate to sustainability, and there are many ways to support sustainability while abroad. Just as you do at home, conserve resources, be conscious of the waste you create, and support the health of our planet and the wellbeing of your host community through your daily actions. Consider the following questions:

- How do you plan to travel around your host site? What environmentally friendly methods are available?
- What resources do you use daily, and how do these compare to the way the locals of your host country live?
- How is waste and recycling managed in your host country?
- What are locals' attitudes towards sustainability generally?

Find more tips for sustainable travel on the [While Abroad](#) page on our website.

## Sustainable Development Goals

When we hear the word “sustainability,” many of us immediately think about the environment. While the environment is certainly a key part of sustainability, we encourage you to think about sustainability more broadly. Sustainability relies on the environment, the economy, and social equity (people) working together to meet our needs today and the needs of generations to come. All around the world, governments, companies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals like you are making sustainable choices daily and are working toward sustainability goals that will help preserve our world ecosystem, support our economies, and improve life for people for generations to come. One helpful framework for this work is the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

- How might you engage with the Sustainable Development Goals while you study abroad?
- What do you think you will learn about sustainability in your host country?

## Carbon Footprint

The choices we make daily impact the environment. When we drive, shop, charge our phones, and use air conditioning, we contribute to the production of greenhouse gases. When we measure this, we call it a carbon footprint.

One action you can take to study abroad sustainably is to learn about your carbon footprint and actively work to decrease it while studying abroad (and when you return home). Want to calculate your daily carbon footprint? There are many carbon footprint calculators out there, including one by the [EPA](#), one by [TerraPass](#), and one by [Conservation International](#).

There are many things we can do to decrease our carbon footprint like eating locally sourced food and walking instead of driving. Take a look at the Tips for Sustainable Travel section for more suggestions.

## Tips for Sustainable Travel

Wondering what you can do to travel more sustainably? There are countless ways to engage in sustainable actions while abroad. We've put together a short list, but you can also find more ideas in the articles linked below as well as by reviewing the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Consider the following actions:

- Purchase a direct flight or minimize the number of flights you take to reach your host location.
- Walk or use public transportation instead of using private transportation.
- Take reusable cloth bags with you when you go shopping (some locations do not provide bags at stores because of the environmental impact)
- Purchase items that are minimally packaged (i.e., vegetables that are not wrapped in plastic)
- Prioritize purchasing items that are made locally (including food and souvenirs!). Support your host city's local economy.
- Limit the amount of meat you eat each day/week.
- If you plan to take trips during your time abroad, consider purchasing carbon offsets for your travel (some airlines include this option at the time of the flight purchase). Remember that there's a lot to see in your host city and nearby – plan a staycation!
- Take shorter showers.
- Unplug electronics when not in use and turn off lights when you're leaving a room.
- Use reusable water bottles and coffee/tea mugs. If you're studying in a region where you must purchase water, purchase the largest size bottle available and fill your reusable bottle.
- Learn about recycling in your host community and recycle. Some locations may also have compost available!

Looking for some additional ideas? Check out the resources below.

- [Sustainable Travel International](#) provides many resources for learning about how to travel more sustainably.
- ["6 Ways to Be a More Sustainable Traveler"](#) from National Geographic
- ["How to reduce your use of plastic on a trip"](#) from Lonely Planet

## Steps for Success: Daily Life

### Before You Go

- ☐ Make a budget for your daily expenses in-country.
- ☐ Understand payment and tipping practices in your host country, as well as how and where to access cash.
- ☐ Contact your bank to tell them when and where you're traveling; ask about their fees and if they have "no-fee" agreements with banks abroad.
- ☐ Contact your credit card company to tell them when and where you're traveling; ask about their fees and get a PIN for any chip cards.

- ☐ Make copies of the front and back of all cards you take; keep a set with you (away from the originals) and with someone at home.
- ☐ Find out from your program/host institution if you can or should open a bank account while abroad, and what you'll need to bring to do so.
- ☐ Research telephone options with your current carrier and program/host institution and understand the reality of local internet connectivity.
- ☐ Let your friends and family know that how (and how often) you communicate with them will be changing.
- ☐ Forward your mail to another U.S. address, if necessary.
- ☐ Research local cuisine, understand your program's meal arrangements, consider your approach, and disclose allergies/restrictions/preferences.
- ☐ Research drug and alcohol laws in your host country
- ☐ Make a plan for taking care of financial aid applications, taxes, voting, or other major events/deadlines happening while you're abroad.

### While Abroad

- ☐ Tell your friends and family at home when you've arrived!
- ☐ Purchase a local SIM card or phone if not provided by your program.
- ☐ Keep checking your UVA email (and home school if non-UVA); set up your 2-Step Login to access NetBadge-protected sites (see Communication & Social Media)
- ☐ Establish a communication plan with friends and family at home (frequency and method) so that you can maximize your immersion abroad.
- ☐ Observe others' responsible behavior around daily life, alcohol and drugs, relationships, etc. Obey local laws and customs.
- ☐ Complete financial aid applications, taxes, voting or any other major events/deadlines happening while you're abroad.

## Health & Safety

This section helps you understand key issues related to student health, safety, and security while abroad. You will also be provided with related resources, best practices while abroad, and things to do before you depart.

### Health

Before you travel abroad, take a close look at the many factors that contribute to your physical and emotional well-being. Traveling abroad will almost certainly affect your health, because so many factors of your daily health have to do with lifestyle and environment. Conversely, the state of your health will have a significant impact on the success and enjoyment of your time abroad.

At this point in your life, much of your health regimen has probably become routine - how much sleep you need, what you do for exercise, eating well. When you enter a new environment, that can all change. Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go. If you are

concerned about your use of alcohol and other controlled drugs or if you have an emotional health concern, you should address it honestly before making plans to participate in education abroad. Contrary to many people's expectations, travel does not minimize these problems; in fact, it often exacerbates them to a crisis stage while you are in an unfamiliar environment.

## Identify Your Health Needs

Be clear about your health needs. Your Education Abroad advisor can help you identify locations and programs that can offer appropriate support.

- Disclose and describe allergies, disabilities, psychological treatments, dietary requirements, and medical needs to the ISO, SDAC, and your program or host institution. Arrangements may need to be made in advance.
- Resources and services for people with disabilities vary widely by country and region, as does access to specialty care. If you have a disability or require accommodations (academic or physical), share this with your Education Abroad advisor early in your program search.

Your healthcare providers can help you prepare for a healthy journey. Update your health records, including eyeglass prescriptions and regular medications. Identify medical resources before you leave.

Ask yourself these questions:

- **What do I need to stay healthy?** Consider what you need for your wellbeing - this often includes diet, exercise, rest, and reflection. What is the food like in your host location? Are there exercise facilities? Is it safe/culturally acceptable to go for a jog in your host city? If you'll be living with others, be honest and forthcoming about your needs.
- **Do I have existing or past medical/mental health conditions?** These can include physical, learning, psychological and other conditions that may or may not require regular treatment (you may not treat a food allergy daily but want your EpiPen with you just in case). Past conditions can also resurface, especially in new environments. Tell your doctor(s) about your travels and plan; UVA offices like [CAPS](#) and [SDAC](#) can also be helpful. Once you are enrolled in your overseas insurance, your provider can help you identify on-site medical services before you depart so that you can continue to receive medical or mental health care while abroad. Chronic medical and psychiatric issues should be stable prior to travel.
- **What health-related stigmas, taboos, or concerns will I face?** All cultures carry opinions about the existence and/or treatment of certain conditions, especially regarding mental health. Acknowledging that you may not encounter these opinions everywhere, what is your host culture's approach to any existing conditions you have? Students in certain locations may also face specific health challenges like insect-borne diseases, smog, and extreme temperatures.
- **What resources are available to me for existing conditions?** If you have an existing condition (diabetes, anxiety, etc.), sharing that information in your post-decision materials can help the ISO advise you about available resources and/or potential challenges. It is also important if you require special accommodations (for example, if you need a special refrigerator in your



room for medications). Your overseas insurance provider can also help connect you to resources.

- **What services are available in case of an illness or emergency?** Are there hospitals or clinics nearby? Do people in your host location go to a pharmacy first for minor complaints, or to a doctor? If you are on a campus, find out if the university has its own student clinic. ***Know how to call the local version of 911 for medical emergencies.***
- **How do I access medical care? Do practitioners speak English?** Find out if you need an appointment first, and if your overseas insurance provider can assist. Most providers have websites with searchable databases of local facilities, and/or a number to call to speak with someone who can help you identify where to go within their network (in emergency situations, go to the nearest hospital or medical facility). When researching providers in non-English speaking locations, find out if there are English-speaking doctors or clinicians available.

**Remember:** You will encounter new environments, new foods, and new situations. Changes in routine may cause short-term health concerns. Health care delivery services may vary. Plan for things to be different.

## Medications Abroad

If you are bringing prescription medications with you, take the following steps. As it can take time to make arrangements, we advise you to get started within one week of committing to your education abroad program.

- Confirm legality – not all medications are legal in every country (or are only legal in certain quantities). Many Embassy websites have information for travelers regarding bringing medications to their country. Review the website of your host country's Embassy in the US. If you need to contact them to ask, explain where you're traveling and for how long, and what prescriptions you want to bring. Ask if you can enter with the medication, and if there are any restrictions on the quantity or any other pertinent regulations.
- Pack the medication in the original container(s) with a letter from your doctor. Keep the medication and documentation with you in your carry-on unless otherwise instructed. Check the [Transportation Security Administration website](#) for updates on permitted and prohibited items, including medicines that you are allowed to carry onto an airplane.
- Try to bring enough medication for the entirety of the program. If you cannot do so, either because of host country restrictions, or you cannot secure enough after checking with your doctor and insurance company, you will need to identify whether the same or similar medication is available in-country. Not all medications in the US are available in other countries. Getting a prescription filled in-country will require a visit to a local doctor.
- It is difficult, and often illegal, to send prescription medications to other countries, so do NOT rely on this as a plan for refilling your prescription while abroad.
- **Medications classified as controlled drugs in the US often face tighter restrictions and may be illegal to possess in any quantity in your host country.**
- If you cannot get confirmation from the Embassy about the legality for entry, or whether you can obtain your prescription in-country, contact your Education Abroad Advisor to be connected to additional resources.



- For contact lenses or glasses, bring a spare set and a copy of your prescription. If you use specific contact solution, you may want to bring that with you, too.

Not bringing any prescription medications? It's still a good idea to bring some over-the-counter medicines and first aid items (keep items in their original containers). The [CDC has a checklist](#) (not all items are relevant for all travelers and destinations). With the recent changes to Virginia's cannabis laws, students should be aware that **cannabis products in any form (ingested, topical, hemp, CBD, THC, etc.), for any purpose (medicinal, recreational, cosmetic), may be illegal in your host location(s).**

- As with prescription medication, consult your host country's embassy for legal questions/status. Be sure to research laws for all countries that you will transit through.
- Consult with your healthcare provider for potential alternative legal treatments.
- Make an informed decision. Different countries will have different levels of risk. Understand what is legal in your host location as well as the potential consequences if illegal. Failure to comply with other countries' laws can lead to such adverse consequences as financial penalties and incarceration.
- Be an informed consumer. Remember that cannabis products in the U.S. are largely unregulated. Labels are often inaccurate, making ingredients and side effects unpredictable.

## Travel Preparation & Immunizations

Consult the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Travelers' Health](#) website, the [UVA International Travel Clinic](#) pages, and your program materials for more information about your destination and how to effectively prepare. Requirements, such as those for yellow fever vaccination, may vary based on where your trip originates, so read CDC guidelines closely.

UVA students are encouraged to make a pre-travel appointment at the International Travel Clinic. The Travel Clinic can provide immunizations and travel medications, complete good health forms or letters for study abroad programs and visa applications, and more.

The International Travel Clinic offers specific vaccinations for travel which may not be available at most doctors' offices. All travel vaccines given at the clinic are covered in full for students with Aetna Student Health Insurance. Care providers provide travel counseling regarding food and water borne illnesses, insect borne diseases, traveler's diarrhea prevention and treatment, malaria prophylaxis, and rabies risk. The clinic is coordinated by health care providers Certified in Travel Health.

For travel to all destinations, make sure your routine vaccinations, such as tetanus, are up to date. Immunizations for UVA students can be checked at [Healthy Hoos](#).

For travel to medium to high medical risk destinations (all countries except Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Japan), students are strongly encouraged to make and attend a travel appointment at the Travel Clinic at Student Health & Wellness for **at least one month prior to planned travel**. If you are studying abroad for the fall semester or academic year, make your appointment by July 31 to be able to access the Clinic's services.

**Non-UVA Students:** Your home university may have a similar clinic and resources available. If not, check with your care provider for guidance.

## Mental Health

Being in a new environment, even for a short time, may cause additional stress on a condition that is easily manageable in the United States. Whether or not you currently take medication or see a psychologist or psychiatrist, it is important to prepare yourself for possible shifts in your mental health. If you do see a mental health professional, discuss your upcoming sojourn abroad and determine support and communication strategies ahead of time if needed. Once on site—or ahead of time—identify local resources through your provider or host institution. Determine prior to departure whether the medications you take are legal in your host country and whether you can take enough with you for your entire time abroad.

In addition to on-site resources, UVA students may access on-demand mental health consultations via TalkNow. Students should plan to **sign up for the [Timely Care App](#)**. TalkNow allows students to connect with a trained mental health expert any time of day. It is not therapy but is effective for managing in-the-moment stressors or crises and making a plan for how to connect with ongoing mental health care, and for students who are trying to be proactive about their mental health.

The UVA Student Safety & Support Team is available to UVA students while abroad, and Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is available to students for one initial consultation while abroad.

- **(434) 924-7133** — Student Safety & Support Team
- **(434) 243-5150** — Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

*Non-UVA students should also research the appropriate contacts at your home institution.*

## COVID-19

Take steps to inform yourself about COVID-19 in your host country and to protect yourself and others.

The CDC [COVID-19 page](#) gives recommendations for international travel as it relates to COVID-19. You should also review the CDC's recommendations to [Prevent Getting Sick](#) and what to do [If You Are Sick](#), as well as the UVA Student Health & Wellness [COVID-19 Guidance](#).

You might want to include PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) when making your packing list, which could include face masks, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes. You may also want to bring a few self-test kits with you. The CDC recommends all US travelers be fully vaccinated and [up to date](#) with their COVID-19 vaccines prior to departure.

If you do become sick with COVID-19, CISI insurance will reimburse for medical expenses. However, you should have a plan in place to cover possible expenses upfront. In cases where you will be using the program's insurance instead of UVA's policy, make sure you understand what that policy covers regarding COVID-19 illness, exposure, need to quarantine/isolate, etc.

Knowing your responsibilities and those of your program/host institution will help you properly prepare ahead of time, and access resources in your host country should you need to.

## Climate & Weather

Weather patterns vary around the world and are changeable. Research your host location: what temperatures and conditions are typical? What kind of extreme weather events occur, and when? Are there concerns about air quality during certain times of year? In the event of a heatwave, are buildings typically air conditioned or not? Understanding what to expect can help you pack appropriately, and make related arrangements with regard to any existing medical needs.

## Bed Bugs

Unfortunately, bed bugs can be found around the world. As you embark on various travels, either with your program or for a weekend away, learn about the [signs and symptoms of bed bugs](#).

## Upon Return

Taking care of yourself doesn't end when you get back home! Continue with any treatment (including anti-malaria medication, if your prescription calls for it), and reference these articles for things to watch out for when you return from abroad: [CDC: Getting Sick After Travel](#) and [UVA: International Travel Clinic](#)

### Additional Resources:

- [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Travelers' Health](#)
- [UVA International Travel Clinic](#)
- [UVA Travel Health Resources](#)
- [CDC Packing a Medical Kit](#)
- [CDC Insect Protection](#)
- [CDC Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis \(PrEP\)](#)
- [CDC Traveling Abroad with Medicine](#)
- [US Department of State Country Page \(sections titled Local Laws, Health Considerations, and more\)](#)
- [Student Perspectives: How to Practice Self-Care While Studying Abroad](#)
- [Student Perspectives: Tips to Handle Study Abroad Stress](#)

## Insurance

There are multiple types of insurance that you will likely need to plan for while abroad:

### Medical and Emergency Insurance

Students traveling outside the U.S. for University-related purposes (including education abroad) are required to enroll in the UVA international health and emergency assistance insurance plan through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI).

Students on most UVA programs will be automatically enrolled in CISI. Students who need to purchase CISI themselves (including those participating in outside and exchange programs) will be

prompted to self-enroll in their post-acceptance requirements. Some outside program providers include insurance that meets UVA's coverage requirements, so students on these programs are exempt from purchasing UVA's CISI insurance policy. Please view [our insurance page](#) for more information about CISI generally, and for a list of those providers.

It is recommended that all travelers plan for medical emergencies by carrying a credit card and/or information on who should be contacted in the event that it is necessary to make financial arrangements to pay for treatment. This is necessary even if your health insurer provides coverage in foreign countries because health care providers in some countries expect payment in advance of admitting or treating patients.

Once enrolled, you will receive an email with an insurance card and the CISI policy. Review the policy carefully to understand coverage and exclusions ("high risk" activities like bungee-jumping are often excluded from insurance policies).

If you are traveling independently before or after your program, you can purchase or extend your insurance coverage for your entire time abroad.

### Host Country Insurance Requirements

Some countries, like Australia and France, require international students enrolled in local universities to have coverage that meets national standards. Sometimes this insurance is provided through the program directly (in some Outside programs); students on Exchange programs are typically required to enroll and pay through their host institution. See your program materials for more details. **Enrollment in host country insurance does not substitute enrollment in CISI or equivalent coverage.**

### Insurance in the US

While your day-to-day insurance coverage in the US is not sufficient to meet UVA's requirements for overseas medical and emergency coverage, it is important that you have a plan for how you will be covered once you return to the US (including if you must return to the US unexpectedly mid-way through your time abroad).

If you use UVA's Aetna student health plan and you are studying abroad for the fall semester or academic year, remember that the existing year's coverage will expire July 31. If you wish to enroll in Aetna in order to continue prescription refills and other health needs beyond July 31 – both prior to your departure and upon your return – Student Health & Wellness has instructions for how to do so. These will be sent in early summer, or you can email [sth-ins@virginia.edu](mailto:sth-ins@virginia.edu).

### Trip/Travel Insurance

The ISO recommends that travelers consider trip/travel insurance that can be used if travel to or from the education abroad destination is interrupted or if a change in itinerary is required.

Travel insurance can protect you from certain financial losses such as a delayed suitcase or having to cancel travel due to illness or a medical emergency. This type of coverage is optional and not included in the UVA insurance policy or through your personal homeowner or renter policy. Look into this when purchasing your flights.

## Personal Belongings & Insurance

Personal belongings may be covered by your personal or parents' homeowners' or renters' insurance policies. However, you may need to purchase a "rider" or "personal articles floater" itemizing any high-value items with which you are traveling (i.e., laptops, jewelry, etc.). Because study abroad students have been targets of theft, **it is recommended that students NOT take precious articles abroad. Leave valuable jewelry and irreplaceable items at home.**

## Safety & Security

One of the most important steps in managing your safety and security in any location is to **be informed**. Understand how to navigate your new environment and keep updated on local and regional politics and conditions. Resources include your program materials, local and national news sites, US news sites with international coverage, the [Department of State country pages](#), and the [Department of State Worldwide Caution](#). Likewise, keep updated on news from the US (or your home country) as US events (such as elections) and foreign policy decisions can impact the perception and potentially treatment of US citizens abroad.

**Remain alert** while abroad, even after you get settled into your host location. Be aware of your surroundings and your possessions. Pay attention to the normal patterns and behaviors in your community. Listen to and trust your instincts. Take notice if there is a deviation from that norm, including unknown individuals "hanging out" in your building or any unusual activity nearby. Beware of pickpockets and purse-snatchers, especially in crowded areas. You may be bumped casually and unaware of a violation.

**Take precautions** as you would in any US city or unfamiliar location:

- Know where the nearest police station and hospital are and keep emergency numbers handy.
- Go out with a friend or in small groups during free time. Take a reliable cab or walk with a friend. Do not go out alone at night. Do not go into unsafe or unknown areas alone.
- Be selective and cautious in giving your name or address to strangers.
- Minimize personal information you reveal about yourself, especially through social media.
- Use money belts or a concealed purse for your passport, visa, money, credit cards, and other documents.
- Do not carry your address on or with your keys.
- Avoid demonstrations. Don't gather at "American" hangouts.
- Do your best to blend in, be polite and low-key. The more confident you seem, the less likely you will be a target for trouble.
- Avoid carrying phones, cameras, etc. exposed to the public eye while walking in the streets, especially if you are walking alone.
- Minimize your contact with people who have questionable government affiliations or who you suspect might be engaged in criminal activity.
- Be skeptical of "money-for-nothing" offers and other opportunities that seem too good to be true, and be cautious of being offered free favors, especially those involving government processes such as obtaining visas, residence permits, and work papers.

- Be aware that predatory behavior is common in the nighttime economy abroad, with visitors and students targeted. Drink spiking is widely reported, including recent reports of "needle-spiking" (surreptitious injection of a person in order to take advantage of them). Take precautions and be vigilant when out: share plans in advance, stick with trusted friends, and look out for each other.

**Keep in contact** with your program, as well as your friends and family. Alert your on-site program or host institution staff of any concerns, or any plans that you have made to travel, per their policies for independent travel approval/notification.

**Make good choices.** If you have been told or advised to avoid certain areas of your host location, do not go to those places. If you are with a group somewhere, don't leave anyone behind when you depart. Follow the practices outlined above, and adhere to any additional rules or guidance from your program or host institution. Failure to do so can have negative implications for your own safety and security, and that of your peers, as well as perceptions of American or international students abroad.

### Common Hazards

**Pickpocketing:** While major events and catastrophes make headlines, students most often encounter petty crime like pickpocketing. Follow the precautions listed above, and always be aware of where your belongings are. Keep items out of back pockets, and make sure your purse or bag has a secure shoulder strap and zipper. Wearing a backpack? You might carry it on your front in high traffic areas. Don't keep your credit cards, ID cards, etc. on/in your phone case.

**International Driving:** Automobile accidents are the #1 cause of injury to U.S. study abroad students. Because signs, roads, and laws are quite different in other countries it is NOT recommended that students drive while abroad. However, if you intend to drive, verify the required identification/licenses for the countries in which you will be traveling. Some countries require an International Driver's Permit, while others will accept your U.S. state-issued driver's license.

**Pedestrian Safety:** Rules and norms for pedestrian safety vary widely – it's more than knowing what side of the street traffic drives on! Understand what's expected of pedestrians (and drivers) in your host location. This is a good time to take out your ear buds and pay attention to what's happening around you.

**Public Transportation:** Learn about any relevant cultural practices or prevalence of (and how to avoid) petty crime. Consult local resources for the best means of inter-country travel during your free time.

**Water Safety:** According to the CDC, drowning accounts for 13% of deaths in U.S. travelers abroad. [Consult their resource on water safety](#) for best practices if you will be engaging in water activities.

**Fire Safety:** Understand fire safety best practices for both prevention and what to do during a fire. See [Fire Safety 101](#), courtesy of the University of California system, for more information.

## In the Event of an Incident

### In the Event of an Incident:

1. **Contact local authorities (police, medical response, etc.).** **Know how to call the local version of 911 for emergencies.** There may be different numbers for different emergency services.
2. **Contact your on-site program director, staff, or host university support.** If you're not with your professor, program, or at your host university when an incident occurs, they will need to be alerted.
3. **Contact embassy/consular services.** Locate the call center number in your passport (U.S. citizens); non-US citizens should identify and keep available the number for their local embassy or consulate prior to departure.
4. **Contact family, UVA, and your home institution (if you're a non-UVA student).** Your family will want to know you're ok but remember that they are often not able to be a "first responder" as they are far away! UVA, and in some cases your home university, can provide support. You are required to report any arrests to Student Safety & Support.

### Important Numbers:

1. **+1 (434) 982-3010** - the ISO maintains an emergency answering service 24/7 at this number to be connected with ISO and UVA resources.
2. Have your **program or host institution contact information** with you at all times, as well as the **local equivalent of 911** for police, ambulance, and fire
3. Find the **contact information for the nearest US embassy or consulate**. International students: find and keep your embassy phone number on hand.
4. **Contacts at home:** keep these available to you while abroad, including your parent/guardian and physician and mental health practitioner, as applicable.
5. Keep contact information for your **insurance provider** on hand (CISI, plus any host country insurance if required).

*Keep a paper copy of important numbers in your wallet in addition to the numbers stored in your phone.*

### Additional Resources:

- [State Department: U.S. Students Abroad](#)
- [FBI Student Brochure: Safety and Security for U.S. Students Traveling Abroad](#)
- [ISO Health & Safety Abroad](#)
- Your program materials



Remember, on-site responses to incidents, and the care available, may be different from what you expect in the US or at UVA. You continue to have access to resources in Charlottesville as a UVA student, or a student participating in a UVA program. Please contact the ISO if you have questions or concerns after any type of incident abroad. The ISO can be reached 24/7 at +1 434 982-3010.

## Legal Matters

As a guest in your host country, you are **subject to all its laws**. Keep in mind that what is legal in your host country may be quite different from the U.S. and/or your home country. **Neither ignorance of local laws nor your status as a U.S. (or other) passport-holder will excuse you from the consequences of illegal actions or behavior.**

[The Department of State country pages](#) are good starting points for understanding what is legal in your host country. It is also important to understand that local authorities may behave and/or the legal process may proceed differently than you are used to in the U.S. and/or your home country. The best way to avoid encountering these differences is to refrain from behavior that is likely to get you into trouble.

In the unlikely event that you are arrested abroad, [the U.S. Department of State consular officials](#) can, once informed of the arrest, assist in a limited number of ways, but they **cannot**:

- Get U.S. citizens out of jail.
- State to a court that anyone is guilty or innocent.
- Provide legal advice or represent U.S. citizens in court.
- Serve as official interpreters or translators.
- Pay legal, medical, or other fees.

International students should reach out to their embassy/consulate to learn about what support is available in case of legal issues or emergencies abroad.

## Illegal Drugs

**NEVER travel with any contraband drugs.** You are subject to the law of the country you are in. Even if you find yourself in a location where the use of drugs by local citizens is either ignored or treated very lightly, when American students are apprehended indulging in or in possession of contraband, they can be dealt with in a very harsh manner. You can jeopardize your experience abroad by taking such a risk. If approached by someone selling drugs, walk away. Even a conversation with a suspected narcotics pusher is seen as an act of intent to purchase by some countries. Conditions of imprisonment in a foreign jail are not something you want to experience. Remember that being a citizen of the United States or other country does not matter; the U.S. Consulate cannot get you released if you are arrested. They can only help notify family and arrange for legal representation. Consulates and embassies of other countries may also have limited ability to help.

## Conduct

While studying abroad, you are a representative of the University of Virginia and have agreed to comply with UVA's rules, standards, and instructions for student conduct and behavior, as well as



any stated codes of conduct from the host institution/program provider. See the links below to the most pertinent University policies:

- [Honor Code](#)
- [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [Standards of Conduct](#)
- [Parent Notification Policy](#)
- [Policy on Interpersonal Violence](#)

### **Continuing Duty to Report Criminal Arrests**

Students have a continuing duty to promptly report to the Office of the Dean of Students any arrests for violations of federal, state, local, or international law, excluding minor traffic violations that do not result in injury to others. This duty applies regardless of where the arrest occurred (inside or outside the Commonwealth of Virginia), and regardless of whether the University is in session at the time of the arrest. An arrest includes the issuance of a written citation or summons regardless of whether the student is taken into custody by law enforcement. Charges related to driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are not “minor traffic violations” and must be reported. Students must contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 434-924-7133 within 72 hours of the incident that led to their arrest. Failure to comply with this continuing duty will result in the immediate referral of a student to the University Judiciary Committee and may also result in imposition of an interim suspension by the University Dean of Students (or designee).

*-from Student Rights and Responsibilities*

### **Power of Attorney**

Particularly for semester or year programs, it is advisable to designate a trusted individual to take care of legal or financial matters on your behalf while you are abroad. This is particularly helpful with regards to filing taxes, arranging financial aid, and paying bills.

## **Steps for Success: Health & Safety**

### **Before You Go**

- ☐ Consider your health needs; you will have the opportunity to disclose them in your post-decision materials.
- ☐ Visit your primary care physician, dentist, mental health professional and other medical practitioners to prepare for a healthy journey; for UVA students, CAPS and SDAC can also help you prepare.
- ☐ Make sure routine immunizations are up to date.
- ☐ Make arrangements for bringing/accessing required medications or other medical care while abroad (see steps above).
- ☐ Make a Pre-Travel Appointment at the Student Health & Wellness International Travel Clinic for personal consultation and vaccinations or prescriptions for your itinerary. (UVA Students)
- ☐ Download the [TimelyCare app](#). (UVA Students)

- ☐ Research your host country's approach to health and wellbeing and understand what medical care is available on-site.
- ☐ Pack a medical kit, if desired.
- ☐ Enroll in overseas medical and emergency insurance (if UVA doesn't enroll you directly); review your policy information to understand what assistance your insurance provides.
- ☐ Make arrangements for other types of insurance as needed.
- ☐ Research safety and security best practices in your host location; monitor current events.
- ☐ Arrange for a Power of Attorney if you choose to do so.
- ☐ Meet with an International Student Advisor and understand how you will re-enter the U.S. at the conclusion of the program (international students).

### **While You're Abroad**

- ☐ Check in with yourself regarding your health and well-being.
- ☐ Remain alert and practice situational awareness, even after you've "settled in" to your host country.
- ☐ Take precautions as outlined above.
- ☐ Practice good communication with your program, host family, and others who will want to know where you are and how you're doing.
- ☐ Know what to do in case of an emergency.
- ☐ Keep emergency numbers on you at all times (hint: keep a paper copy in your wallet in addition to the numbers stored in your phone)
- ☐ Find out the do's and don'ts of local transportation.
- ☐ Understand fire safety best practices for prevention and what to do in a fire (see above link).
- ☐ Understand and follow local laws.

### **Upon Return**

- ☐ Complete the course of anti-malaria or other medications prescribed for your time abroad, as applicable.
- ☐ Keep an eye out for symptoms that may be related to your recent travels.
- ☐ Follow up on any outstanding insurance claims, if necessary.

## Identity & Culture

Before you travel, it is important to explore identity, culture, and learn about the cultural adjustment process.

### Identity

Your identity is made up of your **values & beliefs, customs & traditions**, and **traits & characteristics**. Take a moment to think about the components of your identity and those that are of particular importance to you.

You will almost certainly find that aspects of your identity change or are challenged by yourself or others while you are abroad (that's part of getting out of your comfort zone!), but this won't be the first time you've experienced this - think back to when you arrived at college!

Your identity may be seen differently by others abroad. For example, you may identify as Hispanic first, then American, but abroad you may be seen as simply American. If you are in a country or region from which you claim your heritage, you may not be considered "local" and instead treated as an outsider. Conversely, you may be perceived as "local" and therefore expected to embody local norms, customs, and characteristics of which you may be unaware.

Some aspects of your identity may or may not be understood or accepted, or, in some cases, certain actions or practices may not be legal in your host culture - thus, it is very important that you research the norms, values, and laws of your host location.

There are many resources about identity abroad, including the [ISO's Your Identity page](#), and the [Diversity Abroad Guides](#). You are always welcome to reach out to your Education Abroad Advisor to discuss questions or concerns about your identity or needs as you consider program options and prepare to participate in your education abroad program.

### LGBTQ+ Travelers

Some countries have strict laws that affect the LGBTQ+ community. Students should be assured that UVA programs employ the same expectations for tolerance, respect, peer support, and inclusion as we use in Charlottesville, while also being aware of and sensitive to the increased risks that the LGBTQ+ community faces. UVA students on outside and exchange programs are encouraged to understand the resources and support available through their programs or host institutions. The US Department of State [Human Rights Reports](#) provide an overview, by country, of conditions relative to US law. Additionally, US Department of State [country pages](#) include information for LGBTQ travelers.

US passport-holders may now select X as their gender marker on their passport application. Please note the following, from the [US Department of State page for LGBTQI+ Travelers](#), "While the United States Government issues passports with the X gender marker, it cannot guarantee your entry or transit through other countries. You may face entry restrictions in countries that do not recognize the X gender marker. Before you travel, check with the foreign embassy or consulate in the United States for more information."

Be aware that, depending on the country, you may be required to provide binary gender information (male or female) by immigration officials or border agents, or when checking into hotels. Also be aware that not all airlines have an X gender marker option when booking flights online. Finally, be aware that an X gender marker may be used as justification for harassment by local officials. Your Education Abroad Advisor can help connect you with country-specific guidance if you have questions about traveling with a passport with an X gender marker.

## Culture

Your identity is shaped in part by your culture. So, what is culture? [Watch this YouTube video](#) to learn more.

Developing **cultural sensitivity** is an important aspect of adjusting to your new environment - that is, recognizing the differences between cultures without making a value judgement (right or wrong, better or worse). Here are some tips for developing cultural sensitivity:

- Research the country - use books, (reliable) internet sources, study abroad returnees.
- Observe and ask questions - you can learn a lot by watching and interacting with local residents. Be respectful with questions!
- Honor the customs and learn the language - make the effort to learn about these important parts of any culture.
- Avoid generalizations - one positive or negative experience is not a reflection of the whole culture.
- Know your cultural "key" - seek to understand why certain actions, expectations, or beliefs are common and how they developed.
- Engage respectfully - including understanding [when and how it is appropriate to take and share photos](#).

Learn more about where you're studying: use the links below, and resources provided by your program or host institution.

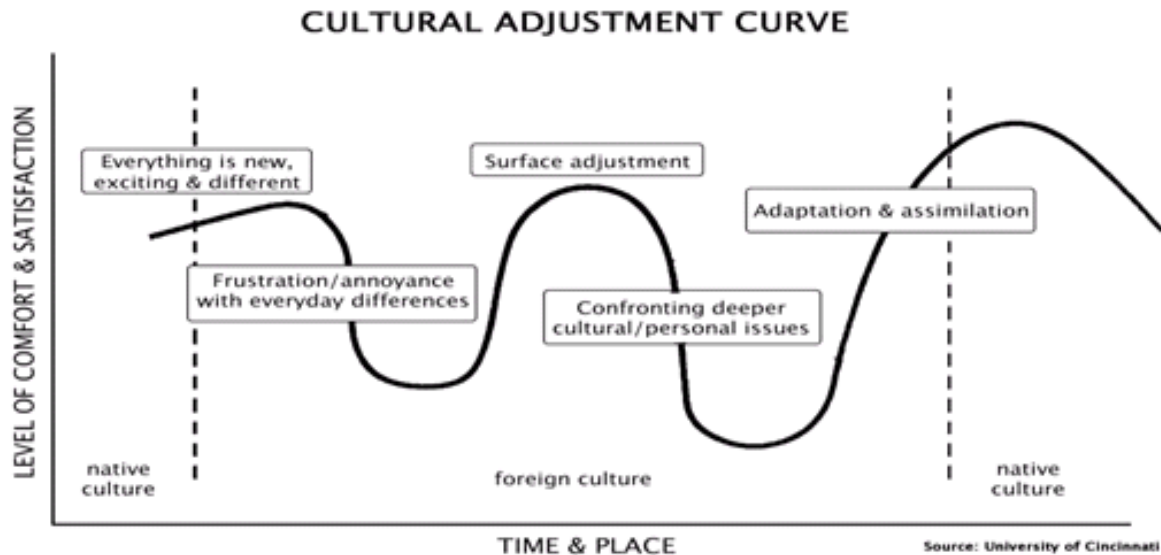
- [Diversity Abroad Destination Guides](#)
- [GoAbroad.com Articles by Country](#)

## Culture Shock & Cultural Adjustment

You already have skills navigating different cultures between your family, school, and work contexts, and those same skills can be used and enhanced while abroad. **Culture shock**, or culture fatigue, is a typical phenomenon when encountering a new culture and country for an extended period of time. Adjusting to using a different language, eating different food, and establishing a new routine, can be both exciting and challenging.

The less obvious aspects of your own culture, such as values (time, personal space, gender roles, communication style, etc.), habits, expectations, common practices and procedures may not coincide with your host culture.

The resulting “culture bumps” can produce an emotional response—frustration, anger, impatience, anxiety, confusion, depression—called culture shock. A moderate amount of these stresses is a natural part of intercultural transition. Stress and “bad days” happen at home, too - however, while abroad you may not have the cultural knowledge with which to understand the situation or support system or outlet to help you resolve the stressors.



The diagram above shows "level of comfort and satisfaction" on a vertical axis, and "time and place" on horizontal. The solid curved line shows that as people move from their native culture to a foreign culture experience, "everything is new, exciting and different." Then the line dips quite low along the vertical axis as they experience "frustration/annoyance with everyday differences." The line rises again to a high level with "surface adjustment" to a foreign culture. It dips low again to show that a person's level of comfort may decline as they confront deeper cultural/personal issues. Finally, the line returns to a relatively high level at "adaption and assimilation" of the foreign culture. You may not hit every high and low on this curve or experience them sequentially. If you are studying abroad with a group, you may find that you experience different parts of the cultural adjustment curve at different times from others – that's normal! Everyone's experience is unique.

## Adjustment Strategies

How do you manage cultural adjustment? Harvard Business Review has some strategies:

- Acknowledge Assumptions - not just your own (your host community will have assumptions about you just as you have about them!)
- Keep an Open Mind - reserve judgement of, and be patient with, others and yourself.
- Have a Sense of Humor - step back and see the humor in your misunderstandings, missteps, and mistakes.
- Get Involved - meet new people and make connections in the community.

- Communicate - talk to program staff, host family, and other students. Ask for assistance in interpreting what you see and experience.
- Reflect - Consider blogging, journaling, taking photos or video, etc. Not everything has to be published for family or friends.
- Take Care - don't forget to take time to take care of yourself. What do you do at home for "me" time, and how might that be different in your host country?

[Watch this YouTube video](#) to hear how five students from around the world experienced culture shock. The University of Minnesota has [a helpful worksheet](#) for developing a self-care strategy abroad. The University of Michigan also offers resources around [resilient traveling](#) that also may be helpful.

**NOTE:** Most students study abroad without incident and navigate the ups and downs of daily life using strategies like those above. However, if at any time while you are abroad, you feel anxious, overly tired, or otherwise "off" - as a result of a specific incident or "just because" - talk about it. Talk to program staff and ask them to help connect you to local resources. As a UVA student, you continue to have access to UVA staff and resources, too (including the ISO, [Student Affairs](#), and [Just Report It](#)).

## Consider This

### Does the US have a culture?

How do you think other people perceive the U.S.? Do we have an "American Culture"? Here are some hints we found in travel guides for people from other countries who are visiting the U.S.:

- It is mandatory to have a smile or a little "how cute" tilt to your head if you come across a child or pet. Even if they are ugly. (France)
- In America, people laugh like horses. This is normal. (Japan)
- The average American has a low level of culture and education, most only know English and that inadequately...The strength of their culture is sports, junk food, and Hollywood. (Italy)

Are these examples how you would describe the U.S.? Is the U.S. culturally homogenous? No! Will your host country be? No!

[Check out this Ted talk](#) about the dangers of a "single story" when we encounter another culture.

### Talking about culture and politics abroad

While abroad, you will be seen by many people you meet as a representative of the U.S. (even if you're an international student here, you may be seen in this light since you attend a U.S. university). Depending on where you go abroad, and when, you may find that you are frequently asked about aspects of U.S. culture and politics. Many students are surprised at the extent to which people in their host country are informed about U.S. politics in particular and how frequently political matters (including people's individual beliefs, candidate preferences, etc.) are discussed even among relative strangers.

Here are some strategies identified by UVA students who have studied abroad:

- Stay informed about current events in the U.S. that are being covered by international news media.
- Stay informed about politics and current events in your host country/community.
- Come up with a tactful response to questions about your own political/religious/cultural beliefs ahead of time.
- Don't make assumptions about the political/religious/cultural beliefs of people who engage you in conversation.
- Be honest and prepared for people who might have different opinions from you. Discuss the topics maturely and be polite and respectful, even if you disagree.
- Don't get wrapped up in a conversation where you're not comfortable. A simple "Honestly, I don't know enough about it. I'll check it out/read up on it" can be an acceptable response.

## Steps for Success: Identity & Culture

### Before You Go

- ☐ Reflect on your own cultural identity.
- ☐ Research your host country/community, including history, economy, and culture.
- ☐ Review the adjustment strategies and identify which ones you want to use that may need preparation (setting up a blog, etc.)
- ☐ Inform yourself of current events in the US and your host country.

### While Abroad

- ☐ Check in with yourself - where are you falling on the adjustment curve?
- ☐ Use the adjustment strategies and any others that you learn about!
- ☐ Keep updated on current events in the US and your host country.

### Upon Return

- ☐ Know that you may experience parts of the curve again upon your return - this is normal!
- ☐ Use the [Resources for Returnees](#) information on the Education Abroad Website.

## Travel and Arrival

Whether you are a seasoned traveler, or this is your first time on an airplane, there are things you need to take into account when preparing for your travels and while you're en route.

### Packing

Rule number one in packing: don't let your luggage weigh you down! Follow these best practices:

- Know your airline's policy on baggage size, weight limits, and fees for overweight or additional luggage.
- Use a suitcase that makes sense for you and your program: rolling wheels are helpful on solid surfaces, but don't do great on dirt, cobblestones, etc. Soft-sided bags are easier to store once you've arrived, but don't offer as much protection while traveling. Backpacks are ideal because they will leave your hands free, but you have to be comfortable carrying them.
- Pack your luggage and then take it for a test run; carry it around the block and up and down stairs. Then re-evaluate what is absolutely necessary and empty half of it. Leave some space for things you will bring home from your time abroad.
- Understand what you can and can't bring with you on your travels. The [TSA website](#) has information about the liquids rule for carry-on luggage, what locks you can use for your checked baggage, and more. You may encounter different regulations when traveling from or within your host country/region.
- Put your name and contact info on a luggage tag and inside your bag in case the suitcase breaks or is lost. **Never leave your bags unattended!**

### Carry-On

Bring a carry-on bag (also subject to size and weight limits) that you can also use as a daypack while you're in-country. A few things to make sure are included:

- Important documents: passport, visa, insurance cards, credit/bank card
- Arrival and accommodation instructions/addresses (for students on UVA programs, a Travel Guide will be shared a couple weeks prior to departure)
- Medication and/or glasses or contacts (see Medication section in Health & Safety)
- Toiletries and change of clothes in case your checked luggage is lost.
- Items of value (laptop, tablet, photos, etc.)

### Clothing

Take interchangeable clothing that can be layered. Dress may be more or less formal or conservative in other countries; do your research and pack accordingly. As you may be abroad through more than one season, plan ahead and take some clothes for changing weather.

What you wear tells people about you. Think about this when packing and avoid items that often reveal our American-ness (shorts, baseball caps, clothing with slogans or logos, etc.). Leave jewelry, expensive watches, and other irreplaceable valuables at home.

You will probably be walking far more than usual. A good pair of comfortable shoes is a must!

### Electronics

Electronic voltage and wattage levels are varied and can wreak havoc if your devices do not match. [See this page for information on electrical outlets and voltage used in countries around the world.](#) Most travelers will need an outlet adapter(s). Power converters, as well as outlet adapters, are available at electronic stores and travel shops. Converters can be bulky and small appliances (i.e.



hair dryers, electric toothbrushes, etc.) still may not work well. Check appliances for built-in voltage switches (most laptops have these) and be selective about taking electronics with you!

Be aware that for some flights to the U.S. electronic devices are required to be charged in order to pass through security to confirm they are not hollowed out; fully charge any devices you are carrying before going to the airport. Other airlines may require you to check electronic devices over a certain size. Restrictions and requirements regarding electronics can change quickly; verify with your airline before departure.

## Travel Documents

You will need a passport to travel outside the United States. Depending on your destination, you may also need a visa, residence permit, and/or additional type of documentation affirming that you have proper approval to enter and stay in your host country. Often visas are obtained prior to departure, which can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks or even months. If you need to secure additional documentation upon arrival, make sure that you understand what you need to bring with you to facilitate that process. **Make copies of everything you take with you; have a set with you (away from the originals), and leave a set at home.**

Keep a photocopy of your documents in a safe place at home with family and keep a copy in a secure place with you abroad (away from the originals). These include:

- Identity page of your passport
- Visa page (if applicable)
- Flight information
- Insurance card(s) and policy details
- Copies of your credit and debit cards (front and back)

## Passports

**Your passport is your most crucial legal document while you are outside the U.S. Treat it with special attention.**

If your current passport expires within six months after your program ends, your passport is not considered valid for the purposes of your education abroad program. **Apply for or renew as soon as possible to avoid delays;** you may need to pay additional fees for expedited processing. Passport applications and instructions can be accessed from the [U.S. State Department website](https://travel.state.gov) and picked up at the main post office in Charlottesville or from most major passport offices. International students should contact their local embassy/consulate to learn about their passport renewal process.

Keep a photocopy of the photo and signature pages of your passport in a safe place at home in the U.S. (or your home country) with family and keep a copy in a secure place with you abroad. If your passport is lost or stolen, it is easier to replace it if you have a photocopy.

## Passport Grant

For Pell Grant recipients applying to an education abroad program, UVA will provide funds to cover costs of obtaining a passport. The Passport Grant is available for students who have either never had a passport or would need to renew theirs to participate in their intended program. See our [Additional Financial Resources](#) page for details.

## Visas

Most countries (especially for semester or year programs) require a visa allowing you to enter the country as a student. Each country has its own regulations, application process, and timeline; it is your responsibility to know and abide by the visa requirements for your country of study. Consult the appropriate Embassy or Consulate for information, as well as your education abroad advisor, and your program or host institution's materials.

There is almost always a fee attached to the visa application and the process can take several weeks or even months; don't wait until the last minute! Delays in obtaining a visa may cause you to arrive late. Note also the earliest date that the consulate will accept an application. Many visa applications require you to turn or send in your passport with the application which means you may be unable to travel internationally while your application is under review. Consider this when planning other international travel before the program starts.

Should your visa application require enrollment verification, contact your Education Abroad Advisor at least one week in advance of when you need it.

Keep a copy of your visa documents in a safe place at home with family and keep a copy in a secure place with you abroad. If your visa is lost or stolen, it is easier to replace if you have the copy accessible.

## International Students

International students may have different visa requirements from U.S. students for the country to which you are traveling, and the application may involve longer processing time. Begin researching these requirements early. Your Education Abroad Advisor can provide limited support and an enrollment verification letter if needed.

All international students need to meet with their International Student Advisor to discuss re-entry documentation and requirements. International students who study abroad need to consider how they will re-enter the U.S. after the conclusion of the program (or at the start of the next term). Make sure to:

- meet with an [International Student Advisor](#) in the ISO (or corresponding office at your home school) while preparing to study abroad.
- keep your embassy phone number on hand while traveling.
- bring your signed I-20 documents.

## Flights & Travel Information

Make sure that your family has a copy of your itinerary. Your program or host may require a copy as well. UVA requires you to enter **confirmed ticket information** in the Travel Information form in your application, not just intended plans. In the event that your flight reservations are changed, you are expected to edit your response accordingly. Note that some countries will not allow you to enter unless you have a round-trip ticket showing you intend to depart the country.

## Country Information

**Do not book flights that travel through a country with a University Travel Restriction, State Department Level 3 or 4, or other restriction. Consult the [ISO's Travel Alerts, Notices & Warnings page](#) for details.**

Research entry and exit requirements, local laws, health and security considerations, and more, for your destination and any countries you transit through. Consult the [State Department Country Information](#) page and [CDC Travelers' Health](#).

## At the Airport

Always confirm your flight at least 72 hours in advance and allow yourself plenty of time to get to the airport, especially for international flights and during peak travel seasons. Generally speaking, travelers should arrive 3 hours prior to international flights, and 1.5-2 hours prior for domestic; verify on your airline's website.

**All travelers must follow all TSA and airline guidelines, as well as those of any equivalent agencies in the countries or regions to which you travel.**

Even if you are an experienced traveler, take time to look online at maps and other resources of any unfamiliar airports you will be traveling through. You may need to take a train or bus, or walk a significant distance, to get to your next flight if you have a connection. Take a screenshot or print out directions in case you don't have cell reception immediately when you land. Many airline apps also have airport maps available in them.

If you encounter delays or cancellations, talk to your airline (it may be helpful to call their number on your cell phone while you are waiting in line to talk to someone in person, then work with whomever gets to you first). Airline staff commonly deal with agitated travelers; **being calm and polite can be particularly helpful in these situations**. Here's a series of articles on delays, cancellations, and other mid-travel changes: [USA Today Passenger Rights](#).

## In the Air & on Arrival

During your flight(s), you can help prepare yourself for a successful experience on arrival.

### Jet Lag

Depending on the length of your flight and the time difference, you may experience jet lag or traveler's stress. Some helpful ways to counteract jet lag include avoiding caffeine and alcohol while traveling, getting plenty of rest, eating healthy food, drinking plenty of fluids (particularly juices and

water), getting moderate exercise and wear loose, comfortable clothing. Once you've arrived, going outside during daylight hours helps the body adjust to the new environment.

## Landing Cards

As your flight nears its destination, you may receive a card or form from the flight attendants to fill out before you land. You may be asked to make a customs declaration (part of the check to see if you are bringing any restricted or taxable items into the country), and/or to list your purpose for travel and details of your stay (including address of your accommodation or host). Keep all arrival instructions from your program or host institution with you while traveling as they may include specific guidance on how to complete these forms.

## Arriving at the Airport

Upon arrival in your host country, you will go through Immigration and Customs checkpoints in the airport. The Immigration officer will ask for your passport and may ask for your acceptance letter to your host institution to prove that you are entering as a student, and in countries that require it, your visa paperwork. If the immigration officer is satisfied with the proof of your status, they will stamp your passport.

After immigration, you will typically need to pick up your luggage before continuing to the Customs checkpoint. Follow directions to the baggage claim area; most have carousels with monitors indicating which ones are being used for which flights. When you see your bag, retrieve it from the carousel and **check that it is really yours** before moving on (suitcases often look alike). If your luggage doesn't appear and you've confirmed you're waiting in the right place, go to the lost luggage section of the baggage claim and see the Lost Luggage section below.

Once at the Customs checkpoint, you will be asked to give your landing card to the officer. Be aware that some countries conduct inspections of your luggage and personal effects.

## Lost Luggage

Lost luggage is a headache no one wants to deal with but unfortunately sometimes does occur. If your suitcase is not appearing on the luggage carousel for your flight:

- Stay calm! It will be okay.
- **Don't leave the airport before going to baggage claim and filing a report for your luggage.**
- Keep your baggage ticket that's issued when you check your bag. It's also helpful to have a photo of your bag (or be able to provide a detailed description).
- *Before you travel:* Put a luggage tag on your bag, and another inside, with your name and contact information.

Additional tips for what to do if the airline [Lost Your Luggage](#).

## Carbon Offsets

When we fly, we contribute to the emission of greenhouse gasses, the primary one being carbon dioxide. There are a variety of [factors that impact the amount of carbon emitted by your travel](#), including length of flight, number of layovers, etc. There are a variety of resources that you can use

to identify emissions from your flights and take action. See the Carbon Footprint section of this Handbook for examples of carbon calculators.

One way to decrease our carbon footprint is to purchase carbon offsets. Carbon offsets fund projects that help to balance the greenhouse gases we produce. Examples of carbon offsets include renewable energy projects (wind, solar) and tree-planting.

The ISO, as part of its [sustainability plan](#), purchases carbon offsets for air travel on ISO administered and operated education abroad programs. This means that if you participate in an ISO-administered program abroad, the ISO will automatically calculate the cost of the offset for any flights related to the program and purchase offsets on your behalf!

If you are participating in a program administered through an outside provider (i.e. CIEE, IES, SIT, etc.), one of the graduate schools, on an exchange program, McIntire Third Year Core, or undertaking independent travel abroad, we encourage you to consider purchasing carbon offsets for your air travel. Some airlines offer the ability to purchase an offset when you book your ticket. Some outside providers (including FIE) offset student travel for some programs.

Check out these articles to learn more about how carbon offsets work and how to identify reputable offset providers. There are many carbon offset providers available, and we encourage you to explore on your own to find a carbon offset provider that looks exciting to you!

- [Sustainable Travel International's carbon offset information](#)
- [Gold Standard Estimates and resources for carbon offsets](#)
- [Green-e Find Green-e Certified Carbon Offset?](#)

## Steps for Success: Travel & Arrival

### Before You Go

- ☐ Pack! Use the guidelines above and use luggage tags on and in your checked bag(s)
- ☐ Confirm your passport is valid at least 6 months after you plan to return to the U.S.
- ☐ Apply for a visa (if necessary) within the appropriate timeframe.
- ☐ Make your travel arrangements according to your program/host institution arrival instructions.
- ☐ Make copies of your passport, visa, insurance card(s), credit/debit cards, and itinerary; leave a set with family and pack a set in a secure location away from the originals.
- ☐ Bring originals and copies of your U.S. visa and signed I-20 documents; leave a set of copies with family (international students)
- ☐ Make arrangements for your transportation to the airport.

### While You're Abroad

- ☐ Obtain a resident permit or other residency documentation (if necessary)

We hope this handbook is helpful as you are planning for your experience abroad. Continue to reach out with any additional questions or concerns at any time. Safe travels!