

Choosing and Planning a Program

Why Study Abroad?

Studying abroad can be a rewarding experience, and choosing to do so can be a monumental decision. Studying abroad can give you a new perspective, new friends, new educational and career goals, and a passion for new cultures and adventures. Many of today's companies do business on a global scale, and study abroad experience is always a welcome attribute on a resume.



Selecting a Program

Examine the reasons why you want to study abroad and what you wish to gain from the experience. Do you wish to learn a language? See historic sites or landmarks? Experience a new culture? Rediscover your heritage? Asking yourself these questions can help you choose a destination, program, or course of study. After narrowing down your options, examine the style of the program and experience of the faculty leading the program. Make sure you understand the itinerary and the requirements of the program. Does the program require previous language classes? Does the program require a home-stay? Make sure to contact the program leader if you are unsure about any aspect of the program.

Financing a Program

Financing a study abroad program can be a challenge for any budget conscious student. A Study Abroad Student Scholarship is available through Lone Star College System. Please see the International Programs and Services website for eligibility requirements and deadline dates <http://www.LoneStar.edu/20168/> . Remember the costs of study abroad can extend beyond the program fee and tuition. Since financial means differ, it is important to determine what you can afford and budget accordingly. Some students find it helpful to have a daily or weekly budget for certain items not covered by the program.

Some items to consider when creating a budget:

- Passport Fees
http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html)
- Tuition *(It is important to remember the program fee does not cover tuition for the classes you will be taking.)*
- Souvenirs
- Meals or excursions not covered by the program cost
- Medical costs (including vaccinations)
- Toiletries
- Entertainment
- Guidebooks or maps
- Exchange fees, currency fluctuations
(<http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic>), ATM fees, Traveler's Checks fees, Credit Card fees, etc.
- Phone cards and/or internet café fees



Applying for a Program

So you know where you want to go and you know how to finance your trip. What now? Apply for your program and make sure you are accepted. Applying early is recommended because some programs have deadlines for payments at different dates. Go to the IPS website to see the programs offered and contact the program leaders representing each program <http://www.LoneStar.edu/56378/>. You will also need to register for the classes you will be taking abroad. Applying for a program and paying the program fee does not substitute for registering for classes and paying the tuition.

Know Before You Go

Documents

- **Passports** are your key to international travel and it is of the utmost importance to keep them safe and guarded. If you have a passport, check the expiration date and make sure the passport will not expire before or during your study abroad program. If you have never applied for a passport before, it is important to get the application process done as soon as possible. You should allot 2 months for standard processing in order to get your passport on time. Please see the US State Department website for detailed instructions on how to apply for a new or renewal passport (http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html). Leave a photocopy of your passport with a family member or friend at home and bring another photocopy with you to be stored in a locked suitcase or hotel safe. In the event of passport loss, you will need to go to the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. Providing a copy of the passport will be helpful in getting a replacement to return home. Keeping an extra passport photo with you will also expedite the replacement process.
- A **visa** is an entry permit granted by the authorities of the countries where you will study and travel. Not all countries require visas, so it is best to check with your program leader. Please note: You will need a passport before applying for a visa and you will need to allow adequate time to apply for the visa. Application requirements and costs vary from country to country.



Researching your Destination

As always, knowledge is key when studying abroad. Take time to learn more about the country or countries you will be visiting. Browse the internet, check out a book from the library, or speak with someone with experience in that part of the world. You will find the information to be extremely useful and allow you to enjoy your experience even more. If you are participating in a program that does not emphasize language (example: Studying Art History in Italy), it would be wise to learn a few important words and phrases before departing.

Try researching:

- **Religious beliefs** of a country can be a fascinating part of everyday life and culture. Research the religions practiced in the country you will be visiting and learn how they influence the culture. If you are religious, please research places of worship in the areas you will be visiting. Are there unwritten rules you should know before visiting?

Examples:

- Immodest clothing, shorts, or bare shoulders can prevent entry into a church in Italy. Even for sightseeing purposes.
- In the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland, it is impolite to ask a person their religious beliefs.
- Understanding **laws and regulations** of the country you visit will help you to travel wisely. Does the country have laws similar or dissimilar to the United States? Asking these questions now can prevent headaches and frustration later on.
- It is vital to understand the **manners** of the countries you visit. Conflict can arise from simple cultural misunderstandings.

Examples:

- In France, it is customary to say hello to a shopkeeper when entering a store and goodbye when exiting.
- While the 'OK' hand gesture is inoffensive in the United States, the same gesture can mean 'money' in Japan, be construed as offensive in Brazil and Germany, or mean 'zero' in France.
- In some Asian countries, it is offensive to stab your chopsticks into your food upright. This resembles the incense offered to deceased relatives.
- In some Islamic cultures, displaying the sole of one's foot is considered rude.
- The hand gesture used for 'Stop' in the United States (displaying the palm with all five fingers extended) does not share the same meaning in Greece. It is considered a grave insult.



- Researching the **politics and current events** of the country can be important when assessing the safety and stability of the region. Brush up on the news and look for any travel warnings from the Department of State http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html.
- You may not be planning on studying **history** on your study abroad program, but it is a good idea to brush up otherwise. Knowing the history can provide you with cultural clues and give you an edge.
- Understanding the **pop culture and entertainment** of a country can also give you cultural clues. For example, India has one of the largest and most successful film industries in the world and produces over 1,000 films a year. Taking the time to experience some of the local popular culture can also enrich your study abroad experience.
- **Food** can be one of the best parts of experiencing the local culture when studying abroad. You will be exposed to different tastes and sensations while understanding how a society celebrates life and family. If you have dietary



restrictions, be sure to inform your program leader. While you want to keep an open mind when tasting cuisine, you also want to be safe. Do not eat undercooked meats, and be wary of uncooked vegetables and fruits in regions with tainted water. Also, food can vary within the country and how it is interpreted in the United States.

Example:

- You may find the food you have in Italy will be quite different from your favorite Italian restaurant in Houston. Things to keep in mind: regions of a country can produce different tastes and flavors. The food you taste in Milan may be different from the cuisine in Sicily. Also, immigrants who open restaurants in the United States will sometimes experiment to please the palettes of the local community. The result is a fusion of local and International tastes.

Living Arrangements

Living arrangements abroad can vary from program to program. Does your program plan on staying in a hotel? Dormitories? Home stay? Perhaps your program has a combination of living arrangements. Your program director will usually make housing choices for the duration of your program. If you plan on getting away for a free weekend, or traveling on your own before or after your program, reading about accommodation choices will be of a great benefit. If booking on your own, always compare safety, location, amenities, and price before making an informed decision.

Things to consider:

- **Hotels** are often used in study abroad programs with extensive travel. It is not uncommon for programs to have a week in a hotel and then combine another style of accommodation (such as home stay, dorm, etc.). To cut down on costs, many programs will often assign roommates to share a hotel room. It is sometimes possible to request a single, but at an additional expense. Just as programs differ, hotels can differ. Here are some common styles of hotels:

- **Bed and Breakfasts** are often locally owned and operated in a community. They tend to feel very home-like and offer a limited number of available rooms. The rates can vary, but can sometimes be less expensive than traditional hotels. It is wise to do research on bed and breakfasts, and compare rates.
- **Hostels** are often inexpensive, student frequented, and informal. You will find yourself surrounded by a variety of travelers from around the world, and can pick up tips and friendships along the way.

The atmosphere of a hostel can be quite different than a traditional hotel, so it is important to understand the differences before booking. A hostel usually has shared rooms, bathrooms, and kitchen amenities. A lodger will rent a bed and may find they are sharing a room with a co-ed or same-sex crowd. In some hostels, private rooms may be available as well as lockers to store belongings you do not wish stolen. Hostels vary in quality and price and it is best to research before booking or renting a bed. If staying in a



hostel, you will need to bring your own bed linens or sleeping sack, as well as shower shoes.

- **Traditional Hotels** can also vary in quality and price. Lodgers usually have private rooms and showers. When traveling abroad, you may find familiar international chains or locally owned establishments. Take advantage of provided safes for safekeeping of documents. Research your choices and make an informed decision.
- **Dormitories** vary by institution and often provide an affordable way to study abroad if staying in one location. Dormitories can be great for making friends, arranging study sessions, and staying cohesive as a group. If staying in a dormitory with local or international students, this can be a great opportunity to broaden your horizons and learn the local language. You may be sharing a room or bathroom with more than one person(s), and it is best to discuss the specifics with your program director. Make sure to keep your doors locked and bring items not provided by the dorm (shower shoes, soap, linens, etc.).
- **Home stays** are a wonderful way to learn local culture and language. You will often be assigned to a family based on personal preferences and become a member of that household for a specific period of time. Home stays are often arranged by the program, so it is best to check with your program leader. Will you be expected to contribute to the household responsibilities? Will you dine with the family at a specific time? Will you have a curfew? Will the family allow you to use their phone or computer? You will also have to research the culture in depth to understand customs and traditions (and avoid misunderstanding). Home stays often create lasting friendships and rich memories, so it is an opportunity not to be missed.

Money Matters



The best way to secure your funds is to diversify your access to cash. Bring 1-2 credit cards, an ATM/Debit card, Traveler's Checks, and Cash. If your credit card is stolen, you can rely on your cash, ATM/Debit card, or Traveler's Checks. In addition, make 2 copies of your passport, plane ticket, credit cards, traveler's checks, and ATM/Debit Card. Leave one set of copies with a trusted friend/family member at home,

and bring one set of the copies with you on your trip to be stored in the hotel safe or locked suitcase.

Communication

Communicating can be very important while studying abroad. A phone call, email, or letter can keep you connected with your life in the United States. Choosing in advance how to communicate will save you money and frustration while on your trip. It is best to research the country you will be visiting and determine how you will be able to access a phone, the internet, or the post office.

- Using the **telephone** can range from inexpensive to exorbitant when traveling abroad. A little homework beforehand can really save you some money. Research phone cards from US phone companies with access numbers available in the country you will be visiting. Once purchasing the card, the company will give you directions on how to dial out (toll free) and connect with the United States. Some cards will simply bill your credit card or allow you to pre-pay minutes. Shopping around will provide you with many viable options. You can choose to buy phone cards in the country you will be visiting, but it is best to research and compare costs. Bringing your cell phone is generally not advised as the rates are pricey and service may not be available in all areas. Be aware of the time differences when calling home. You may be speaking with someone very sleepy on the other end!
- **Emails** are an inexpensive and popular way to reach out. Instant messaging (on the computer) can also be a great way to communicate. Research the availability and rates of internet cafes in the area you will be studying.
- **Mail** is definitely the reliable standby, but can take longer than other methods of communication. If you are sending a postcard to your friend in Sugarland, you will need to include 'USA' under the city, state, and zip. Also ensure your letter is shipped via air mail. Without that stamp, it may be placed on a sea vessel and take 3 months to arrive at your friend's house!



Packing

Packing for your trip will greatly depend on the country and climate you will be visiting. It is advisable to study your program's itinerary and be realistic about the items you will need.

The items listed below are suggestions. Ask your program leader if laundry facilities or services will be available to you during your program as this will make a huge difference when making your packing decisions. In addition, please take your destination and personal needs into account when packing.

Clothing

- Comfortable pair(s) of walking shoes
- Shower shoes
- Socks
- Underwear
- Pants, Shorts, Capri's, etc.
- Shirts, Sweaters
- Rain Jacket or Poncho
- Jacket
- Pajama's
- Swim suit
- A 'special occasion' outfit (for dinners, shows, etc.)




Personal Items and Medicines

- ***Prescription Medicines*** need to be in their original container with the name, prescribing doctor, and dosage clearly marked. You may be required to have a note from your doctor explaining why you are taking the drug, so it is best to be prepared. It is wise to contact the US Embassy of the country you will be visiting to ensure your drug is not illegal. You may be unable to obtain refills abroad, so be sure to bring enough of the medicine with you. Never carry prescription medicines in your checked luggage.

- **Over the counter medicines** can be tricky to buy abroad because they may be sold under a different name or with different ingredients. If you do travel with over the counter medicines, make sure to keep them in their original containers.
- A **first aid kit** can really come in handy! Bandages, antibiotic ointment, Tape, hydrocortisone, bug repellent, aspirin, pain-killers, anti-histamines, antacids, anti-diarrhea, cold and flu medicine, motion sickness medication, etc.
- Forgetting a **toiletry item** while traveling can be frustrating. When abroad, there is no guarantee you will find a similar product that will suit your needs. Make a list of items you need and use the list while packing. Some items to remember:
 - Replacement pair(s) of contacts, contact solution and case, glasses
 - Deodorant/antiperspirant
 - Hair products: shampoo, conditioner, comb, gel, hair spray, etc.
 - Soap
 - Razors (in checked luggage)
 - Feminine hygiene products
 - Lotion, facial cleaners, cosmetics
 - Toothbrush, floss, toothpaste, mouthwash
 - Sunscreen
 - Tweezers, nail clippers, scissors, nail files (in checked luggage)
- **Miscellaneous items** need special consideration when going abroad. You need be mindful not to over-pack and exceed the weight limit, and you also need to remember use of such items may be difficult overseas. For example, your American hairdryer will not work in your French hotel room. Converters are not always reliable, so use electronics with caution.
 - Backpack



- Camera and film
 - Calculator
 - Umbrella
 - Batteries
 - Battery operated alarm clock
 - Sewing kit (in checked luggage)
 - Dictionary or phrase book of the destination country
 - Voltage converter
 - Addresses of postcard recipients
 - Leisure books or magazines
 - Binoculars
 - CD or MP3 player
 - Pictures of your family, friends, pets, significant other, etc.
 - Journal to record your daily activities and thoughts.
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- When packing your ***luggage***, make sure to respect the weight limits. If you plan on buying a great deal of souvenirs, make sure to compensate accordingly. Excess luggage fees are your responsibility. It is advisable not to travel with irreplaceable items such as expensive jewelry, family heirlooms, etc. Please see the TSA website and respect the regulations in place for carry-on and checked luggage <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/index.shtm>.

Adjusting and Culture Shock

While abroad, you will discover many differences (small and large) to your everyday life and routine. Being away from your friends and family, adjusting to the climate and cuisine, and learning a new language and culture can all trigger stress and anxiety. Depending on the length on your program, you will be exposed to different levels of culture shock and will experience varying levels of adjustment. Speak with your

program director to learn more about the length of the program and the potential culture shock you may experience.

Some things to keep in mind:

- **Learning the local language** can greatly help you feel more at 'home' in your surroundings.
- **Communication with home and making friends with students** on your program can combat feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- Come to **view culture shock as a positive growing experience**. You will condition yourself to adapt to new and possibly uncomfortable situations in your future beyond study abroad.
- **Expect to feel frustrated or sad**. You may have a frustrating experience communicating at a local market when practicing your language skills. You may miss your family and loved ones, but you may miss unexpected things such as your favorite pizza shop, your weekly TV show, etc. Being in a different country can mean an entirely different lifestyle. Expecting frustration and/or sadness will give you an edge when coming to terms with your emotions. It is also a comfort to students to know that they are not alone when experiencing these emotions.
- **Understand your habits and routine in the United States may not apply to your new environment**.

Health and Safety Abroad

Personal Safety and Reducing Risk

Taking an active role in your personal safety is paramount when studying abroad, especially as an American student.

Don't stand out as an American. Try to fit in with your surroundings and dress as the locals dress. Sneakers, jeans, tee-shirts, American logos or brand names, sweatshirts, and baseball caps have all been identified as 'typical' American attire. Try to research the local dress and bring articles of clothing that will blend in with the local environment. Frequenting American



hang-outs (McDonalds, Hard Rock Café, etc.) can also be risky. When exploring the town on your own, avoid going out in large packs as this can bring unwanted attention.

Do leave your valuables behind. Americans are often stereotyped as being rich and extravagant and you don't want to feed that notion. Do not wear expensive clothes and jewelry, and leave expensive handbags and luggage behind.

Don't become involved in political discussions or protests. Americans are often blamed for their government's policies and actions. Avoid becoming a scapegoat by politely bowing out of heated political discussions and steering clear of political rallies and protests.

Do take a buddy along with you when exploring. While traveling in a large pack isn't advised, being alone isn't either – especially at night. Avoid short cuts, dark alleys, deserted areas, and poorly lit streets.

Don't hitchhike or accept rides from strangers.

Do research and understand the modes of local transportation when traveling on your own. Even though cost is a factor, you want to make sure the transportation is safe. Is the metro the way to go? Taxi cabs? Bus?



Do know the tricks of pick pockets. Some will distract you while robbing you from behind. Stay on your guard and know who is around you. Don't keep your wallet in a back pocket or carry a purse with easily accessible zippers.

Don't allow alcohol to put you in a dangerous situation. Drinking ages may be lower in the country you will be visiting, but you still need to be responsible about drinking abroad. Many cultures encourage moderation or abstinence and frown upon binge drinking and excess. Being intoxicated can also lower your guard and inhibitions and make you an easy target for a criminal.

Do keep informed of local events by reading local newspapers.

Don't carry items or luggage for anyone but yourself. While abroad, you may make lifetime friendships and enjoy the company of new and exciting people. But do not carry any items or luggage for them! The luggage may contain drugs, weapons, and/or other illicit items and you may bear the consequences if they are found in your possession.

Do let your program leader know about your plans. If you plan to spend your free weekend in Bath, let your program leader know before you leave London.

Do know where the local hospital, police station, or fire station is located.

Don't be free with information regarding yourself or your fellow students. Be cautious when asked personal questions from strangers.

Do try to understand and respect the local culture, customs, and local laws.

Understanding these things can reduce misunderstandings and prevent such misunderstandings from escalating.

Don't engage in illegal activities or use illegal drugs. Penalties, prosecution, and legal representation abroad can be quite different abroad. Do not make the mistake of getting yourself into trouble! The penalty for possession and/or sale of drugs in many countries is severe – the worst being the death penalty. Again, being aware of the local laws is extremely important.

Do know the location of the local US Embassy or Consulate.

Do know the local emergency number. The United States uses '911', but a different number may be used abroad.

Don't assume your program leader, Lone Star College System, Office of International Programs and Services, or US Government can get you out of jail if arrested abroad. The Embassy or Consulate can visit you once in jail, notify your family of the arrest, give you a list of local attorneys, and monitor your treatment behind bars. They cannot demand your release, pay attorney's fees, or represent you at trial. Once you are in that country, you must adhere to the local laws and regulations.

Do practice safe sex. AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases have become a deadly epidemic in many parts of the world. Protect yourself and your partner by putting safe sex practices to use. If you plan to be sexually active abroad, be sure to bring a supply of prophylactics you can trust. Availability of such items may be limited.



Medical Care and Insurance

Staying healthy abroad can be a challenge and taking care of your health (if you do become sick or injured) once abroad can pose a bigger challenge.

Things to do before you leave:

- **Call or email your health insurance company and inquire about your coverage abroad.** You may find your coverage to be quite extensive or halt once you leave US borders. If you do not have coverage abroad, inquire about buying supplemental health insurance to fit your needs. *Ensuring you are covered is extremely important as medical bills can skyrocket out of control.* For example, if you are hiking in a deserted area and need to be airlifted to a hospital, the cost of that helicopter ride can be \$10,000 or more.
- As mentioned before, make sure **all prescription and over-the-counter medications are in their original containers.** Prescription medications will require additional proof they have been legally dispensed to you, so ensure you have all the documentation necessary. Some medications may be legal in the United States and illegal in other countries. Contact the US Embassy or Consulate of the country to learn more about the legality of the medication in question. In addition, do not rely on being able to get prescription or over-the-counter medications abroad. Bring an adequate supply of your medications for the duration of your program. Please be aware that any foreign made medications are not FDA approved and cannot be brought into the US. *Place all essential medications in your carry-on luggage as checked baggage can be lost.*
- **Be aware of local hospitals or doctors in case of emergency.** Your health insurance company may also have a list of hospitals and doctors that are within their insurance plan. Requesting a copy of this list can help you select a preferred provider and save you money later on. Of course, in case of a life or death emergency, go to the nearest hospital right away.
- **Be aware of the local emergency numbers.** These numbers vary from country or region, so be aware of the number that applies to your host country.



- **Schedule an appointment with your doctor** if you would like to discuss your personal health in relation to your study abroad program. Be sure to discuss medications, precautions, vaccinations, and review your personal medical history.
- Many programs are very fast-paced and require a good deal of walking and physical activity. **Try to get into shape before the program.** Being in shape can make your body stronger against illness and allow you to keep up with the fast paced lifestyle of the program.
- **Determine the safety of the water and food in the host country.** Drink, gargle, and brush your teeth with only bottled water if it is recommended. Raw fruits and vegetables may not be safe to eat and may be only suitable for consumption when cooked. Be wary of unrefrigerated food, undercooked meats, and roadside/street food vendors. If you get food poisoning, rest and drink plenty of fluids to combat dehydration. Please check with your program director regarding food and water safety.
- **Receive necessary vaccinations for your destination.** Research if there are any necessary or recommended vaccinations for your program. These may or may not be covered by insurance, so please be sure to budget for these items. If your program does not have any extra vaccination requirements, be sure to be up to date on your routine vaccinations. *All vaccinations should be received 2-3 months prior to departure.*



Information for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may find differences in how they are treated or perceived abroad. You may find disability is received with prejudice, stares, rudeness, or fear. Please speak to your program director about making arrangements for specific needs and the facilities available abroad.

Some questions to ask:

- How are people with disabilities received in the host country?
- Will I have access to medical care and services related to my disability?

- How accessible is the country for disabilities? Example: wheelchair ramps, Braille, elevators, etc.

Information for Multicultural or Minority Students

As a multicultural or minority student, you may be concerned about racial tension or prejudice and how it will affect your time abroad. It is important to remember that each culture and society is different and the perception of race and ethnicity also differ. You may feel free of any prejudice or feel the target of hatred or resentment. You may also find that many societies will categorize you based on your nationality, especially if you have Americanized manners, style of dress, language, and behavior. Take some time to research race relations in the host country.

Some questions to ask:

- How are members of my race or ethnic group treated in the host country?
- What kinds of stereotypes exist?
- Has there been racial violence or unrest?
- Will I be able to find members of my racial or ethnic community in the host country?

Please speak with your program leader if you wish to discuss the issue further.

Information for Female Students

Female students may find it harder to adjust due to different perceptions of gender roles and the growing influx of US popular culture. Many countries import television programs from around the world and American shows have gained in popularity over recent decades. By watching such shows as 'Baywatch' and '90210', stereotypes have arisen regarding the behavior and morality of American women as a whole. As a female student, it is important to recognize these stereotypes and learn to deflect unwanted attention in a respectful way.



In some countries, it is acceptable for males to display approval of females in a noticeable fashion. Women are sometimes loudly and verbally approved of, honked at, followed down the street, harassed, touched, or stared at. It is important to recognize

friendly behavior (not uncommon in the United States) may be construed as flirtatious abroad. Making eye contact, smiling, or being friendly can be perceived as a romantic invitation.

How can you prevent misunderstanding?

- Be aware of behaviors that may create misunderstanding and learn to avoid them. It may be friendly to give a nod and smile to a passerby on a park trail in Houston, but it can communicate a different message abroad.
- Research the styles of dress abroad, choose clothing wisely, and try to blend in with the local women.
- As mentioned in the personal safety section, bring a friend when discovering an area apart from the group.
- Do not agree to meet strangers in non-public places.

Try using <http://www.journeywoman.com/index.html> as a resource for your travels. The website features tips from fellow female travelers about safety, clothing, medical concerns, etc.

Please speak with your program leader if you wish to discuss the issue further.

Information for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Students (GLBT)

As a GLBT student, it is wise to do some additional research about the country or countries you will be visiting. You may find some societies have outright acceptance and others may display blatant prejudice. Some questions to consider:

- How open will I be with my program leader or fellow students about my sexuality?
- Do I plan on making connections with other members of the GLBT community while studying abroad?
- Do the places I plan to visit have GLBT-friendly establishments?
- What are the attitudes and social perception of GLBT in the host country?
- Are there relevant laws in the host country I need to be aware of?
- Is the program able to provide me a single room or specific roommate?
- Do I have access to medications or medical services for transgender status?

For more information, please see the NAFSA Rainbow SIG website for students:
<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/student.htm>

Please speak with your program leader if you wish to discuss the issue further.

Coming Home

Customs

When you arrive back into the United States, you will be required to go through customs. Depending on the countries visited, you will have a \$200, \$800, or \$1600 personal exemption for duty free items. There are also limits on tobacco products and alcohol when reentering the United States. Please be aware that legal age limits of the host country do not follow you into the United States. If you are a 20 year old student and plan to bring home a bottle of wine you purchased in Spain, it will be confiscated at US customs because you are not of legal age in the United States.



It is important to remember:

- You may not bring into the United States: fish and wildlife, some fruits and vegetables, some prepared food items, antiques or artifacts, drugs, firearms, biological samples (without permit), merchandise from embargoed countries, some plants and seeds, soil (without permit), etc. Please see the US Customs and Border Patrol website for more information regarding prohibited and restricted items.
- When being inspected by US Customs and Border Patrol, be calm, honest, and answer their questions. They are doing their job and an inspection does not mean they assume you have prohibited items.

- If you have more than the allowable limit for certain goods, you may be required to pay duty. You must pay in US currency as foreign currency is not allowed. Methods of payment vary by location; please see the US Customs and Border Patrol website for more information.

For more information please see the US Customs and Border Patrol website <http://www.customs.ustreas.gov/>.

Sharing your Experience

You may come home from your study abroad program leaping with joy with new experiences and knowledge. You will be very excited to share your new thoughts and ideas with others! You might find friends and family may not be as excited and interested in your stories from abroad. You may come home to find that life has gone on without you, things have changed, or **you** have changed. Studying abroad can change your outlook and perspective without even expecting or realizing it.

Things you can do to share and cherish your experience:

- **Make a photo album or scrap book** with pictures, museum tickets, and mementos you picked up along the way.



- **Keep in touch with your fellow students on your program.** They were experiencing the program right along with you. Reflecting on the program with your new friends can prevent you from feeling isolated about your study abroad experience.

- **Write a summary of how study abroad has shaped you as an individual.** This summary can be used when applying to a 4-year institution and beyond.
- **Offer to share your pictures or words with your professor and/or Office of International Programs.** Your thoughts and visuals can help other students to see the benefits of studying abroad and give them the encouragement to step beyond their comfort zones for their educational enrichment.
- **Consider going abroad again.** There are semester and year-long programs you can explore down the road as you further your education.