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Pre-Departure Checklist

☐ Apply for a passport, if you do not already have one. Renew your passport if it will expire within six months of the end date of your program.

☐ Talk to your academic adviser about the courses you plan to take while abroad. In particular, you should discuss how your overseas courses could substitute for the requirements in your degree audit. Advisers in the Education Abroad Office CANNOT advise you on academic requirements for your degree.

☐ Complete all prerequisites (if applicable) for your program. Any prerequisite courses must be completed before you will be allowed to participate in your program abroad. Double check the requirements for your program to be sure you have completed any required classes. Ask your academic adviser if your department has any specific requirements that students in your major must complete before studying abroad.

☐ Complete all required paperwork for your program/host institution (if applicable). It is very important to pay attention to any forms that need to be submitted and the date by which they must be submitted — otherwise, you risk being withdrawn from your program.

☐ Obtain a visa, if one is required for study in your host country. Consult your country-specific orientation materials to see whether or not you need a visa for the country where you plan to study, and if so, what the requirements are for doing so.

☐ Make flight arrangements to your host city (or the nearest airport). You may wish to coordinate your flight with one or more students from your program, but airline reservations and travel arrangements are the student’s responsibility and will NOT be made on the student’s behalf.

☐ Once you have your flight plans, register your study abroad with the nearest U.S. Embassy through the State Department with STEP (Safe Traveler Enrollment Program) at www.travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/.

☐ Apply for housing at your host institution, if you are participating in a program that does not organize housing for you. Please note that it is not always possible to arrange housing prior to arrival for some programs and institutions.

☐ Attend all Pre-Departure Orientation meetings.

☐ Read all orientation materials provided by both your Education Abroad Adviser and your program/host institution. You must read all of your orientation materials carefully. Otherwise, you may miss out on important details about your program.

☐ Learn about your host country, city, and program/institution. Be informed. Read newspapers from your host city, read guidebooks, and spend some time on your program/host institution’s website.

☐ Talk to your doctor about any health or medical issues you may have that could affect you abroad.

☐ Ask your doctor for a list of medications, generic names, and dosages you will require while you abroad.

☐ Get any necessary vaccinations, if any are required for extended stay in your host country.
Provide copies of your flight itinerary and the photo page of your passport with family members.

Forward your campus mail to your permanent address.

Arrange housing at Penn State for the semester you will return (if applicable).

Organize the following important items to take with you in your hand luggage:
- Your passport (and visa, if required for your program)
- Letter of acceptance or similar document from your program
- Orientation materials
- Letter from your doctor indicating the generic names and amounts of any medicines you require while you are away (if applicable)
- Photocopy of the picture/signature pages of your passport (kept in a separate place from your actual passport)
- Phone numbers and account numbers for any debit/credit cards you are taking with you
- Copy of your Penn State insurance policy (for reference purposes) and your 24-hour emergency contact insurance card

Getting Ready
Living abroad for an extended period of time requires a great deal of emotional maturity, flexibility, adaptability, openness, and independence. Think about the following factors as they may impact your experience:

*Your Personality*
Study abroad is usually a rewarding experience, but it can also be very stressful, particularly in the first few weeks when you are adjusting to a new country, city, school, and housing situation. If you are concerned about how you will adjust and adapt to living abroad, be sure to talk to a counselor prior to departure to get some tips for handling the inevitable adjustment process.

*Your Expectations of Your Time Abroad*
Why have you decided to study abroad? What do you hope to gain personally, emotionally, and academically from your semester or year abroad? What are your expectations of your host country and institution?

*Your Family*
What are your family’s attitudes toward your decision to spend a semester or year abroad? Is travel important to your family? Have your parents or siblings ever traveled outside the US?

*Your Significant Other (if applicable)*
If you have a significant other, talk to him/her about how your absence for an extended period will affect your relationship. Do you intend to see other people while you are away? Make sure you talk seriously about the status of your relationship before you leave.

Personal responsibility is the most important thing you will take abroad with you! While the Education Abroad office will provide you with pre-departure information and an orientation program, ultimately you have to handle a lot of details yourself as you prepare for (and participate in) your international experience.

**Passports**
A passport is an official identity document issued by your own government. You MUST have a passport in order to participate in any education abroad program, and it must be valid for at least 6
months beyond the end of your program of study. If you do not currently have a valid passport, get started on applying for one right away. You can pick up the application for a US passport at any post office (the application includes directions for completing the form). For more information, check out the State Department’s website at http://travel.state.gov. Passport applications can only be turned in at certain locations. The nearest location for students at the University Park campus is at the United States Postal Service at 237 S. Fraser Street in State College. Students at other campuses can search for the passport application acceptance facility nearest to them by using the following interactive Web page: http://iafdb.travel.state.gov.

If You are Not a US Citizen
Your passport rules and application and renewal requirements will be different if you are not a US citizen. To get passport information and an application, you should contact the nearest embassy or consulate for your country of origin.

Renewing Your Passport
If your existing US passport has expired, or if it will expire within 6 months of the end date of your education abroad program, you will need to get it renewed. Procedures for renewing a US passport (and the required form for doing so) are available on-line at: http://travel.state.gov.

Care of Your Passport
Your US passport, although issued in your name, remains the property of the US government. Take good care of it at all times! Sign your passport as soon as possible after you get it, and fill in the requested information on the inside front cover. Don’t alter or tamper with any of the information in the passport, and don’t tear out any of its pages. Always keep your passport in a safe place, and while traveling, keep it on your person (ideally, in a hidden pouch under your clothes) rather than in a piece of luggage.

Lost/Stolen Passports
Loss or theft of a US passport should be reported immediately to the Passport Services office at the US Department of State in Washington (24-hour phone: 202-955-0430), the nearest US consulate or embassy in your host country, local police authorities, and your on-site coordinator. Many stolen passports end up in the hands of criminal organizations—do your part to prevent this from happening, both for your convenience and for the safety of others.

Passport Replacement
Make copies of the picture and signature pages of your passport and keep them in a safe place, along with two extra passport photos. You may want to store these things along with a list of credit card numbers, bank account numbers, and telephone numbers for canceling lost or stolen credit cards. Having this “passport replacement kit” will speed up the process of getting a new passport if yours is lost or stolen.

As an extra precaution, be sure to leave photocopies of the picture and signature pages of your passport with one or more family members. At least one of your parents or close family members should have a passport that will be valid for the entire time you will be abroad. This is important in case you become seriously ill or sustain a life-threatening injury while abroad and want someone in your family to be able to travel to your host city to be with you.
Visa
A visa is a special “approval” that some foreign governments require you to obtain as permission to enter and stay in their country. The visa often takes the form of a sticker that is placed in your passport by the issuing foreign government, although visas for some countries are now issued electronically.

Visas are not required for study in all countries. Consult your program-specific orientation information to see whether or not a visa is required for your host country, and if so, what the requirements are for obtaining a visa for that country.

Airline Tickets
You are strongly advised to buy a round-trip airline ticket rather than a one-way ticket, which can cause suspicion among immigration officials both here and abroad. Also, because program start dates and suggested arrival dates sometimes change from those initially given to you prior to your departure, you are strongly advised to purchase a ticket that allows you to easily change your dates if necessary. Similarly, if you are unsure of exactly when you want to come home (perhaps because you are considering traveling for a while after your program finishes), flexible return tickets allow you to change your return flight if you decide to do so during the course of your program.

Travel Prior to Program Start
Sometimes students want to leave 2-3 weeks before their suggested arrival date in order to do some personal travel (either independently or with friends) prior to the start of their programs. However, you are strongly advised NOT to plan to travel early, especially if you will be studying in a country that requires you to obtain a student visa. Many countries will require you to send your passport away to your host country’s embassy as part of your visa application requirements, and you will not be able to leave the US until your passport is sent back to you. Many students find that they do not get their passports returned to them (with their visa issued) until a week or two before their suggested arrival date overseas. Even if the country where you will be studying does not require you to send your passport away in order to get a visa or even if your host country doesn’t require you to get a visa at all, it is always possible that your program or host institution might change its arrival or orientation dates at the last minute, which would mean that you would need to change your plane ticket in order to arrive on-time. This may be difficult for you to do if you have already planned a trip or stopover en-route to your destination. As a general rule, if you wish to travel independently, it is best (if possible) to do so after your program finishes rather than before it starts.

Packing
Due to personal differences in packing styles and the wide variety of Penn State program locations (and climates), it is difficult to recommend a definitive packing list. Instead, please follow the following general packing tips:

- Don’t pack more than you can carry on your own! Pack your bags and try to carry them once around the block. If you can’t manage, remove some items and repack!
- Leave space in your suitcases for things you may want to buy abroad and bring home with you.
- The type of clothing you pack will obviously depend on the climate of your host country. Check the
monthly average temperatures/rainfall in your host city to get an idea of what kind of weather you should expect during your time there.

- Pack mostly practical items for your time abroad—washable clothes that you can wear for many occasions, comfortable shoes, etc. Dark colors don’t show dirt as quickly as whites or light colors. Avoid packing clothes that require ironing or dry cleaning.

- Don’t buy a lot of new clothes before going on your program—you will probably want to buy clothing abroad that is in sync with local styles.

- When considering what to take abroad with you, think in terms of “can’t live without” rather than “just in case.” Don’t take anything irreplaceable (e.g., jewelry with sentimental value).

- You can buy basic personal care items (shampoo, soap, etc.) in your host country. Don’t take along excessive amounts of these types of items unless there is a particular brand that you can’t live without.

- Don’t pack any essentials or valuables (e.g., medicines, jewelry) in your checked luggage. Keep all these things with you in your carry-on luggage.

- Take only the credit cards you plan to use while you are abroad. Keep these (along with other valuables such as your passport and any cash you are taking) in a money belt or pouch next to your body for the duration of your trip.

- Mark your bags, inside and out, with your name and address (in case they are lost or delayed in transit).

- **Former participants’ tip:** Carry a change of clothes, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a washcloth, and facial cleanser in your carry-on bag. If you discover that your checked luggage is lost or delayed after you arrive on-site, you’ll feel better if you are at least able to freshen up and put on something clean!

### Registration with U.S. Embassy

The US Department of State recommends that US citizens who plan to travel or live abroad for an extended period of time register their trip plans with the nearest US embassy. By registering your trip, you are providing the embassy with important information about how you could be contacted in case of emergency. There is no fee for registration. You can register your trip as soon as you have made your flight plans, and you can update your registration online after you have arrived on-site (for example, you can update your local contact information abroad once you have your new address). If you are not a US citizen, please talk to your on-site coordinator after arrival on-site about how you can get registered at the nearest embassy or consulate for your home country.

### Registration with U.S. Customs

Before you go abroad, you should register any expensive foreign-made items that you are taking with you (e.g., a laptop computer made in Japan) with US Customs before you go. If you don’t register such items, you could technically be charged duty (entry tax) on the items when you return to the US if the Customs Inspector doesn’t believe that you purchased the item in the US. You can register such items at Customs at the international airport from which you will depart to go abroad. The form you will need is a Certificate of Registration form (Form 4457). If you want to take something expensive like a laptop computer with you on your program, be sure to take it with you as part of your hand luggage.

### Sharing Information with Parents

**Please share all of your orientation materials with your parents!** They are likely to have questions about your education abroad program, and many of these questions could easily be answered by materials that we (and perhaps your host institution and/or third-party provider) have already provided.

### Former Program Participants

Students who studied in the country/city where you will study are often the best sources of information about what clothes to bring, what cultural differences they struggled with, and what they liked or did not like. **Prior to departure, take advantage of opportunities to talk to your peers about specific concerns or questions related to your program.**
Recommended Resources
Before departing for your study abroad experience, you should spend some time perusing these recommended resources to keep up with international news and with what is happening in your host country.

- International Herald Tribune: http://www.iht.com/frontpage.html
- World Press Review: http://www.worldpress.org/

Arrival

Navigating Airport
Trying to navigate an unfamiliar airport (especially a large one!) can be particularly confusing if you are alone and overtired. Fortunately, most airports are well-marked with signs designed to help orient visitors. Pay attention to the signs, and you should be fine. However, if you find that you do need help, go to the nearest information desk or ticket counter and ask the agent for directions. In almost any country, you will find at least one agent who speaks passable English. Be on the lookout for the baggage claim area. Try to collect your bags as promptly as possible after arrival to prevent baggage theft, which is common in some countries.

**Former participant’s tip:** If you need to, use the restroom before collecting your luggage—there may not be another restroom between the baggage claim area and the exit door!

Arriving On-Site
- Check your pre-arrival/welcome information from your program—where does it advise you to go when you first arrive? To your dorm? To the study abroad office?
- If your program or host institution does not provide a pickup or “meet and greet” service at the airport, you may need to make your own way by train, bus, or taxi. Almost all airports have a bus and/or train station inside the airport or right nearby, and taxi stands outside of the main exit doors. Ask for help at an airport information desk if you have any trouble locating onward transportation.
- Remember that if you have arrived before the suggested arrival date, you may simply need to go to a hotel or hostel and do your own thing for a few days (this can be a good time to explore your host city). **Do not expect plans or arrangements to have been made on your behalf if you arrive prior to the suggested arrival date.**

Contacting Family
Be aware that you may not have the opportunity or the means to call home as soon as you get off the plane in your host country. However, your family will probably be a bit nervous until they have heard from you and know that you have arrived safely. **Try to get in touch with your family as soon as possible after your arrival.** Before you call, however, be aware that you will probably be tired, confused, and stressed out from the trip. In this state of mind, you may inadvertently upset your family. Try not to talk for too long when you first call home! Let your family members know that you will call them again in a few days when you’ve rested up. If you know the phone number of the place where you are living, give them the number. If you are planning to get a cell phone, tell them that you will give them the number when you get it—and then be sure to do so.
Jet Lag
Traveling to most Penn State Education Abroad locations involves crossing several time zones. For example, local time in England is 5 hours ahead of the local time in Pennsylvania. If you leave from the Philadelphia International Airport at 8:00 pm for a 7-hour flight to Heathrow Airport in London, you will be arriving at 8:00 am London time—just in time to start your day—but it will still feel to you like 3:00 in the morning! This lack of synchronization between your internal body clock and the local time is known as jet lag. It will probably take your body a few days to adjust to jet lag, during which time you can expect to feel tired and run-down. This fatigue—in conjunction with strange surroundings, customs, and (in some cases) language—may produce a temporary sense of depression and homesickness. Be prepared for this, at least during your first couple of days abroad: it is a perfectly normal reaction.

In Country

Culture Shock
Culture shock can be described as the feelings of disorientation and anxiety that many people experience as they encounter and try to adapt to the customs and expectations of a foreign culture. Within any culture, natives grow up knowing what is expected of them in social, family, and societal settings—how to greet strangers, how to hold a knife and fork at a meal, what kind of food to serve at a particular holiday, etc. For example, if you are American, you probably think it’s quite natural to shake hands with a person to whom you have just been introduced, to hold a fork in your right hand (and switch it to your left hand when you need to use a knife at the same time!), and to eat turkey and stuffing at Thanksgiving.

It can be difficult to adjust to life in a foreign culture because you suddenly realize that many of these types of customs and expectations, which seem so intuitive at home, can be unexpectedly different abroad! Students studying in countries that seem culturally similar to the US (e.g., England, Australia) sometimes feel culture shock even more acutely than students studying in countries that seem very different from the US, because they do not usually anticipate the cultural differences that they ultimately discover in their host countries. Be aware that culture shock can strike at any time (and to varying degrees) during your education abroad experience—you won’t necessarily experience it in the first week!

Signs of Culture Shock

☐ You feel very homesick, not just for family and friends but for “America” and what it represents.
☐ You feel isolated and rejected (especially by local students in your host country).
☐ You have a strong desire to spend time with other American students rather than students from your host country or other internationals.
☐ You overreact to minor problems or stressors.
☐ You experience extreme mood swings, sometimes from anger to sadness to happiness and back again…sometimes all in the span of a single day!
☐ You have no interest in things you would normally find enjoyable (e.g., exercising, socializing).
☐ You are excessively critical of your host country and/or local people.

Integration into Host Community

☐ Get involved! Join a student group or society and find your niche; it will be a great way to meet new friends and soon find familiarity in your new home away from home.
☐ Reach out! Get to know other students on your program and in your host country, even when you really feel that you would rather just be alone and block everything out!
☐ Learn to deal with ambiguity, uncertainty, and change—all of which are inevitable components of
any international experience!

- Be open to learning new ways of doing things, trying different foods, etc.
- Get comfortable with feeling stupid sometimes, and learn how to ask for help when you need it.
- Don’t expect everything to be perfect at all times—it won’t be!
- Try to keep a positive attitude.

Diversity Abroad
Some past participants of minority backgrounds have reported feeling exhilarated to be free of American ideas about race and ethnicity while in their host countries. Others reported that they encountered both familiar and new types of prejudice and had to learn new coping strategies. Despite the challenges, very few minority students concluded that any issues of racial or ethnic tension they experienced outweighed the positive aspects of their time abroad.

LGBTQA Abroad
If you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, you should do some special research on your destination. Be aware of the legal restrictions regarding same-sex relationships in other countries, as well as the general attitudes of the population in the country where you plan to study. Other countries may be more, or less, tolerant than the US. Whatever the general rule, there will of course be pockets of exception. Publications about travel issues and gathering places for gays and lesbians include the annual Spartacus International Gay Guide (for gay men) and Gaia’s Guide (for lesbians). The LGBT organization on campus and guidebooks such as Lonely Planet may also be useful resources.

Communication
Staying in touch with family and friends will be important while you are abroad, especially when you are feeling a bit homesick or blue. However, it is also critical to strike a healthy balance between the time you spend communicating with folks at home and the time you spend exploring your host culture. If you spend all your free time communicating with your parents and Penn State friends, you will have difficulty establishing friendships on-site and you may end up feeling disconnected from your host culture.

Telephones and Phone Cards
In some countries, you may not have the option of having your own phone installed in your room if you are living on campus. If you are living in an apartment (either on- or off-campus), you generally have the option of having a “land-line” telephone connection. However, there is usually a rather expensive connection fee. For this reason, most students choose to get cell phones in their host countries. You can also purchase pre-paid phone calls in-country to communicate with friends and family back home. Of course, Skype is a cheap and popular way for students to stay in touch. Past participants or your on-site coordinator would be good sources of information about phone options in your host city.

Computers
In most cases, you will have access to computer labs at your host institution. However, you should not expect that you will have unlimited, 24-hour-a-day access to all computing facilities. You also should not expect as high a ratio of computers to students as you would find at Penn State. You may need to “plan ahead” more than you do here in order to get your written assignments done on time. You may also, at times, need to find alternative computer resources if your usual computing center is busy or closed. Many students use computers at their host institution’s library, or at internet cafés in their host city (for a fee, of course). If you have a laptop, you may want to take it along if you like to do most of your work late at night (when campus computing facilities may be closed) or if you usually do everything at the last minute and you are concerned that you might not have access to a computer when you need it most. **If you choose to take a laptop, be aware that you may not have an Ethernet connection in your room or flat.** Also, be sure to get an electricity converter kit with the proper adapters for your host country.
Personal Travel
Take advantage of your time abroad to do some personal travel, if your budget will allow for it. Good guides to plan personal travel include Lonely Planet, Let’s Go, and The Rough Guide. Just remember your academic commitment—make sure you travel during scheduled school breaks, weekends, or after your classes and exams have finished. Some countries require that you obtain a visitor visa, so you will want to research this prior to making travel arrangements.

Program Departure & Return

Working Abroad
If you think you might want to work abroad after your program ends, you may want to check out CIEE’s Work & Travel program, which helps students obtain short-term work permits. You must apply before departure from the US. Although CIEE gets you the work permit, you must find the job and a place to stay on your own. You can find more information about the Work & Travel program on CIEE’s website.

If you decide to seek employment abroad through an employment agency, a publication called A Word of Caution will help you evaluate the agency in terms of fees charged and services provided. This publication is available free of charge from: Director, Office of Public Information and Reports Staff, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Washington, DC 20520.

Many campus libraries and career services offices have information on working abroad, internships, and voluntary service. Some titles include Work Study Travel Abroad, Work Your Way around the World, and Teaching English Abroad. The magazine Transitions Abroad regularly features articles on working abroad.

Readjusting to Life in United States
You may experience some sort of reverse culture shock when you return. This is to be expected since you have spent your time abroad trying to assimilate into a new culture. It will be an adjustment to get reacquainted with life in the U.S. since many things may seem foreign to you. Most likely, you will not be the same person you were when you left. Your views and outlook on how you approach various issues may have changed. You may develop a new appreciation for the U.S. as well as a critical eye for things you no longer like. Try and remember what it was like to adapt to your study abroad site and realize that it will take some time to get used to life in the U.S. again.

Our office staff will be in touch with you by e-mail after your return home with information about some upcoming opportunities for you to share your international experience with us and with other students:

- Our Welcome Back! seminar, where you will receive more information about coping with “re-entry shock” and about ways of using your study abroad experience in your future life and career
- Our Education Abroad Evaluation, with which you can give us feedback about your experience
- Our Education Abroad Photo Contest, in which you can win money for your best pictures

Staying Connected
Upon your return, there are many different ways that you can share your amazing experience with others after you return to the US. Plan on doing the following:

- Take photos for the Penn State Education Abroad photo contest. Of course, you are planning to take hundreds of pictures while you’re abroad. Why not plan on entering them in the photo contest upon your return!
- Write about your experiences for national study abroad publications. Study abroad magazines such as
Glimpse and Transitions Abroad accept submissions from students about experiences or insights from abroad. Learn more about topics and rules for submission on their websites:

www.glimpseabroad.org/
www.transitionsabroad.com/

Get Involved with Education Abroad

☐ Program Alumni
Respond to e-mail inquiries from students interested in your program, and share your opinions and experiences with them. Upon return from the program, students may share their contact information by logging into their Penn State Education Abroad homepage and managing their alumni information.

☐ Peer Advisers
Peer advisers work at least three hours per week in the Education Abroad Resource Room, 313 Boucke, answering questions from students interested in studying abroad, guiding them through the materials available in our office and Web site, and helping them understand the range of programs available and the general application process. Upon return from an education abroad experience, students receive an email from the Office of Education Abroad with instructions to apply for a peer adviser position through their Penn State Education Abroad program checklist. Typically, students are hired at the beginning of each academic year.

☐ Global Ambassadors
Outreach Ambassadors promote education abroad and global citizenship by telling their stories and sharing their education abroad experiences with other Penn State students. Global Ambassadors give "Study Abroad 101" presentations to prospective education abroad students in classrooms, to student organizations, in the residents’ halls and other events upon request. They also serve as true ambassadors welcoming international visitors at special events, planning and hosting the event "Experience the World in Happy Valley" where education abroad students and international students come together to share about different cultures and countries together to further promote education abroad and becoming global citizens. Upon return from an education abroad experience, students receive an email from the University Office of Global programs with instructions to apply. Students interested in the Global Ambassadors program should contact Kristin Thomas, Promotions and Outreach Coordinator klt16@psu.edu.

☐ Photo Contests
Enter your travel pictures in the Education Abroad Photo Contest, held every semester. Watch this website for announcements of contest dates and deadlines.

☐ Education Abroad Fair
Volunteer at the annual Education Abroad Fair, which is a comprehensive informational showcase of more than 200 education abroad opportunities available at Penn State for undergraduate students. Volunteer as an usher or greeter at the Education Abroad Fair while future global citizens speak directly to Penn State's overseas partners in international education, representatives from academic departments, the Global Ambassadors and Peer Advisers, and other volunteers who have studied abroad. Share your international experiences! Anyone interested in the Education Abroad Fair should contact Kristin Thomas, Promotions and Outreach Coordinator klt16@psu.edu.

Your Next Trip
Many Penn State students travel internationally for the first time on one of our programs. However, almost no one says that it will be their last trip abroad. In many cases, a Penn State education abroad experience is the beginning of a lifetime of travel!