



STUDY ABROAD

tips from students

PREPARED BY HARVARD COLLEGE STUDENTS
IN COLLABORATION WITH THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION



GOING ABROAD

Living in a different language

- Use media, TV, movies, and music to practice language before your trip.
- Even in an English speaking country, you will experience a language gap abroad.
- Always make an effort to speak the local language.
- Resist the urge to speak English with American friends!

Getting used to a new place

- Look up local laws and customs before your arrival.
- Familiarize yourself with the local climate.
- Always check in with your homestay about “ground rules” regarding visitors/noise/arriving home late.
- Take a tour of your host city/town.
- Participate in traditional activities.
- Keep an open mind; be flexible and expect the unexpected.
- Use social media and email to keep in touch with new friends.

Becoming a student

- Learn about the education system and university culture before you go.
- Think about your study abroad goals before you leave to help you make the most of your trip.
- Meet with your professors early, if possible, to discuss expectations (for example: the French exposé structure).
- Integrate into student life by doing campus or city based activities—go where the students go and do what they do! Clubs and sports teams can help give you a network of local friends to help your transition.

Taking care of health

- Be familiar with your health insurance coverage before you leave.
- Keep emergency numbers and contacts (i.e., Harvard Travel Assist, local Anglophone hospitals, program administrators) with you at all times.
- Verify that your prescription medications are legal in your host country, and take enough to last your entire study abroad experience.
- Take something from home (i.e., photos, favorite hoodie etc.) to keep up your spirits when homesick.
- Know where your local American embassy is and register your stay.

Keep an open mind♥
Be flexible and expect the unexpected.



GENERAL TRAVEL TIPS

Plan ahead

- Make copies of important documents and record phone numbers
 - leave one set at your home base and take one with you.
- Store valuables in a safe place.
- *Let's Go* and other travel guides can be helpful resources while you travel. Always have a map on hand and try to have a general understanding of the place before you arrive.

Pack lightly

- Pack lightly, elevators are not usually very spacious, you may encounter stairs when traveling, and will want space for souvenirs.
- Make sure your clothing is weather appropriate.

Be prepared

- Consider buying a cheap pre-paid or pay-as-you-go cell phone to keep in touch with friends, program, and host family – and for emergencies.
- Take some local currency with you.
- Check with your bank about international ATM and credit card fees. (Some banks charge high fees while others have overseas partnerships that eliminate them.)

BGLTQ Student Tips

- Attend the Out Abroad student panel.
- Let the OIE know your destination to connect with a BGLTQ student who has traveled in the country or region.
- Research local laws, cultural norms and the general attitudes surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Find and follow BGLTQ media sources.
- Ask the housing coordinator about a BGLTQ-friendly placement.



SAFETY & THEFT CONCERNS

General advice

- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Trust your instincts – if it doesn't feel right, get out of the situation immediately.
- Try to blend in. Wear appropriate clothing and use small maps (and use the map while in a store rather than on the street). Looking lost makes you a target.
- Do NOT put anything valuable in your back pocket or the outside pockets of a backpack. Use a money pouch or invest in a purse that can be worn over the shoulder with zippers/buckles. Tote bags are not recommended.
- Do not carry a large sum of money on your person.
- When taking weekend or other side trips, try to check into your hostel or hotel before nightfall; it's harder to navigate a strange place in the dark.
- Observe political demonstrations from a distance and DO NOT TAKE PICTURES.
- Know where the nearest police station, hospital, and U.S. embassy are at your destination. Save local emergency numbers to your phone.
- Register your stay with the local American embassy.
- Have a map of the public transit system.
- Know local customs before you travel.
- Take a walking tour of your new destination – you can usually find a free one, and the guides are eager to share their city with you.
- Ask questions (program director, overseas study office, adviser at Harvard) if you have any questions or concerns.

Try to keep your passport in a safe location (i.e., locked in a locker at a hostel), but make sure you have a color copy on your person.

Transportation safety

- Pack lightly; the more bags you have, the more likely you are to lose one.
- Arrive at your airport/bus terminal/train station well in advance. Schedule layovers and transfers to allow yourself enough time to get to your next flight. Remember, your luggage has to follow you too.
- Figure out all the logistics before your trip, like how to get from the airport/train station etc. to the hostel, and have a map handy.
- Never leave belongings unattended! Always take your bags with you, even if you're on a train - do not leave them with anyone you've just met.
- Only take licensed taxis, negotiate the price before getting in, and research prices beforehand to avoid overpaying. Some cabs charge higher fares at night.
- Register your travel plans with Harvard Travel Registry and the State Department, even when taking weekend or side trips.

Avoiding street crime

- Stay aware of your surroundings – it's easy to make “silly mistakes” when you start feeling comfortable in your new destination.
- Do not carry large sums of cash.
- Keep your ATM card safe and inaccessible. Don't make withdrawals from isolated/unprotected locations. Shield the pad when entering your PIN.
- Money belts and travel pouches can be used to deter pickpockets. A purse in front of you helps to keep an eye on your belongings. Be wary of strangers who try to help you or people who bump into you. Crowded areas are ideal for pickpockets, so be extra vigilant there.
- Try to keep your passport in a safe location (i.e., locked in a locker at a hostel), but make sure you have a color copy to carry on your person.
- Make photocopies of your passport and other important cards/documents. Leave a copy in the US and take one with you. It's also a good idea to email yourself a copy in case items are lost or stolen.
- NEVER leave your bag unattended or hanging off the back of/under a chair. Always keep it in sight.
- Pickpockets often work in pairs and children are used as well; be wary of vendors giving “gifts” – you will probably be pressured into paying for them.



MONEY MATTERS

General advice

- Keep different forms of cash/currency/cards.
- Store some cash in a safe place for emergencies.
- Avoid carrying large sums of money on your person or storing large amounts in your hotel, dorm, or homestay.
- If you must carry a large sum, divide it into smaller amounts and store them in different places.

Banks

- Notify your bank of travel dates and destinations to safeguard against frozen accounts.
- Note your bank's international number in case you need to contact them from abroad.
- Consider granting your parents or guardians access to your account in case of an emergency.

ATMs

- Ask your program and others familiar with the region for ATM withdrawal tips.
- Inquire about withdrawal fees from ATMs abroad; fees add up quickly!
- Do your research! Some companies (Charles Schwab and Capital One) offer accounts with no international fees.
- Consult your bank to verify that your PIN# will work abroad. (Sometimes a new PIN# is needed for international ATMs.)

Credit cards

- Find out which credit cards, if any, are widely accepted in the host country; be prepared to operate in a cash-based culture.
- Notify credit card companies of travel dates and destinations. Inquire about international fees. Write down your card information and phone numbers for your bank and credit card company. Keep that information in a safe place, separate from your wallet or purse.
- Make photocopies to leave with a trusted family member in the event you are in a situation where you cannot communicate quickly or easily.

Cash

- Take some USD with you to exchange upon arrival, or make an ATM withdrawal to avoid unreasonable exchange rates. Remember that currency exchange rates fluctuate; monitor them at www.oanda.com.

Travelers' checks

- Travelers' checks are not recommended, as they cannot be used if lost or stolen. Also, keep in mind that some countries do not accept them, and it may be difficult to find banks that exchange them.

Make a budget

- Talk to people familiar with the economy, and day-to-day costs in your host country.
- Contact your program or university for sample budgets.
- Make a detailed list of all possible expenses (cell phone, public transportation, snacks, international calling minutes, etc.).
- Ask local students where they eat and grocery shop to keep costs down.

Financial aid

- Talk to your financial aid adviser about your budget and funding resources.

Notify your bank and credit card companies of travel dates and destinations to safeguard against frozen accounts.



DEALING WITH HARVARD FROM ABROAD

Academics

- Communicate with the OIE if you have any questions about your abroad experience.
- Communicate with specific academic departments for questions regarding concentration, secondary, or citation credit.
- Submit the OIE Abroad Course Enrollment online form as soon as possible (at least 10 days before your program's Add/Drop).
- Stay informed about deadlines (i.e., thesis, plan of study, graduation requirements, postgraduate fellowships, etc.).
- The credit transfer process cannot begin until the OIE has received a complete and official transcript, so request that your program send an official and complete transcript to the OIE at 77 Dunster Street as soon as possible.
- Order additional copies for personal use (i.e. applications for fellowships, graduate schools, and employment), as the OIE cannot make copies for you.

Summer grants, fellowships, internships, and funding

- Plan ahead and stay informed of deadlines; applying from abroad can be overwhelming, but not impossible.
- Email OCS or URAF advisers, professors, tutors, and friends early for advice on applications, resumes, and cover letters.

Interviewing

- You can still be a competitive candidate for summer jobs as long as you keep up with the process and start early!
- Take the 20-minute OCS on-campus interview program quiz to qualify to participate despite missing in-person meetings.
- Some employers have separate deadlines for study abroad applicants; speak to them directly.
- Fall study abroad students: remember to apply for jobs with fall deadlines.
- Spring study abroad students: inform companies in the fall that you will be away during spring interviewing season.

Keeping up with campus life

- Consider switching your campus-based email lists to digest mode, or unsubscribing.
- Consult websites like www.gogobot.com, www.wanderfly.com, www.summerplaybook.com, or www.trippy.com to find out if you have friends in your host country.

Running for board positions in student organizations

- Some organizations may be flexible about running for positions from abroad. Find an advocate within the group to update you on deadlines.
- Informing people as early as possible about your study abroad may bolster your candidacy.
- It is also okay to not run for board positions in your organization. This is the one time you will be away from Harvard and sometimes the only way to be fully away is to take a break.
- Fall study abroad students, remember that Junior Parents' Weekend is in early March.
- Confirm the dates and ask your parents to make their reservations early.

Being a senior

- Yearbook photos are generally taken during April of junior year, but they also offer sittings in the fall.
- The credit transfer process cannot begin until the OIE has received a complete and official transcript.
- Request that your program send an official and complete transcript to the OIE at 77 Dunster St. as soon as possible.
- Order additional copies for personal use (i.e., applications for fellowships, graduate schools, and employment), as the OIE cannot make copies for you.
- Upon request, the OIE will provide you with a letter for an employer, graduate school, or fellowship committee stating that your senior status is pending completion of credit transfer.

Advice for potential thesis writers

- If you study abroad junior spring, you can still write a thesis! Studying abroad can help your research, help you figure out a topic, or just give you a break from on-campus research so you return rejuvenated.
- Remember to balance between staying on top of deadlines and actually enjoying your time abroad. Don't let your thesis consume your experience. (You still have a year!)

Sometimes the only way to be fully away is to take a break.

Before you leave

- Attend department thesis workshops in December, even if you're unsure about writing a thesis.
- Talk to advisers early about deadlines for summer funding (usually early in spring semester) and department deadlines. You need to meet these deadlines even while abroad!
- January is a good time to work on grant proposals.
- Request recommendations and transcripts in time for deadlines.

Working with advisers

- Try to find an adviser before you leave. If you can't, that's okay, you can find one from abroad.
- Be in touch with department advisers while abroad...they want to hear from you and can answer your questions!
- Skype is your best friend for meetings.

Words of advice

- Your thesis topic will likely change between junior fall and senior spring.
- Don't get too set on a topic before you leave.
- Your time abroad may make you want to change your topic.
- Even if you don't have a very specific topic, start reaching out to potential advisers.
- Your thesis topic does not necessarily need to be related to your experience abroad.
- If you decide to write a thesis over the summer, you still can. It's not too late!

PREPARING FOR RE-ENTRY

- Reverse culture shock is real! There are resources to help (i.e., OIE re-entry events).
- Think about sending belongings back ahead of time by mail or with visiting friends/family to avoid excess luggage fees.
- Leave gifts behind for your host family and friends! They will sincerely appreciate it.
- Remember to get your Harvard housing and administrative needs in order.
- Visit the FAQs for Returning to Harvard:
<http://oie.fas.harvard.edu/pages/term-time-faqs>



ADDITIONAL PREPARATION

Prepare at Farnsworth

- OIE student advisers have carefully selected destination-specific books and resources that we hope will help you prepare for cultural adjustment.

Harvard Travel Assist

GLOBAL **EMERGENCY** RESPONSE



Harvard Travel Assist provides medical and security advice, referrals, emergency evacuation services and country-specific information to eligible Harvard travelers abroad. Register your international travel in the Harvard Travel Registry to ensure access to HTA services.

If there is an emergency while traveling abroad:

Call the equivalent of '911', if appropriate.

Call Harvard Travel Assist at +1 617-998-0000 (worldwide, 24/7/365) for additional help, including non-emergency help. You may call collect.

For more information, visit:

www.globalsupport.harvard.edu/travel-tools/harvard-travel-assist