



A GUIDE TO STUDYING ABROAD: INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

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GETTING ABROAD

U.S. Passports

To travel internationally, you will need a passport. Your passport is a document that identifies you as a citizen of the United States. If you need to apply for a passport, information on the application, process and requirements can be found on the [U.S. State Department's website](#).

If you need a passport, apply as soon as possible. Passport processing time can vary depending on the time of year but can typically take anywhere between six to twelve weeks. Apply early to ensure that you have sufficient time to apply for a visa, when necessary. *Expedited processes available for an additional fee.* Once you receive your passport, check to be sure the information is accurate. Then sign it immediately because it is not valid without a signature.

Passport applications may be submitted to either:

1. Register of Deeds Office in the Isabella County Building (located at 200 N. Main Street in Mount Pleasant)
2. Mount Pleasant Post Office (located at 813 North Main Street) by appointment only
3. Passport office in your hometown

If you already have a passport, check the expiration date. Most countries require that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond the end date of your program.

Before leaving the U.S., we recommend you make at least two copies of your passport (one to take with you and one to leave at home in case of emergency). Should your passport be lost or stolen while abroad, you will want to present the copy to the closest U.S. Embassy. This will help when you are requesting your passport be reissued. Also, be sure to keep the copy and the actual passport in a different place, so they are not both lost at the same time.

Visas

A visa is a travel document, issued by a foreign government, giving permission for you to enter their country. When a visa is required, an application must be submitted to the nearest country consulate (typically within 90 days of departure). Once approved, most consulates put a visa stamp in your passport. **Please be aware that it is your responsibility to apply for a visa when it is required for your program.**

There are many different types of visas, but students typically apply for a study visa. Information about entry requirements for your host country can be found on the website of the country's Embassy or Consulate in the United States. The [U.S. State Department](#) provides information about Embassies and Consulates in the U.S. Foreign Consulates are in various cities around the U.S. and provide services for specified geographic areas. Those specified areas will be determined by either where you live or where you attend school.

- Most consulates that provide services to Michigan residents are in Chicago or Detroit.
- The United Kingdom has one consulate in New York that processes visa for the entire United States.
- Some Consulates may require you to appear in person to apply for a visa.
- **Check visa application requirements early!**

Note to students who are not U.S. Citizens: Visa procedures may be different for citizens of other countries. You must contact the nearest consulate for the destination country to inquire about applying for a visa. You will need to follow the instructions for citizens of your home country. It is also recommended that you check the visa webpage for the country's consulate in your home country. Be sure to inquire if there are any special procedures you must follow to apply for a visa while in the U.S.

In addition, make an appointment with your International Student Advisor to discuss your immigration status while studying abroad and necessary paperwork to re-enter the U.S.

FBI Identity History Summary Check (Background Check)

Certain countries require an FBI Identity History Summary Check when applying for a visa. This process may take up to twelve weeks, so it is important to begin early. *Also note*, this process is **not** free and you will be required to pay a fee (see their website for most up to date cos). There are 3 options on how to submit your application:

1. Electronically submit your request
2. Mail your request directly to the FBI
3. FBI-approved Channeler
 - i. An FBI-approved Channeler is a private business that has contracted with the FBI to submit your request on your behalf.

Additional information about this option can be found on the [FBI website](#).

Booking a Flight

Most students participating in study abroad programs are required to make their own travel arrangements. Here are some tips:

- Wait until you are accepted by CMU **AND** the host institution before purchasing airfare
- Acceptance letters typically confirm the date on which you must arrive. If it is possible to arrive earlier, this information will be included
- *The cheapest option is not always the best option!*
- Make your reservation through a travel agent or through the airline directly. Websites may have good prices but may be difficult to contact if you need to change your flight and want to talk to a customer service representative
- Whenever possible, choose a direct flight
 - Alternatively, if direct is not available/too costly, choose the itinerary with the least number of stops and connecting flights
 - With flight delays being so common, each additional stop increases the chances of missing your next connection and delaying your arrival by one or more days
- Purchase a round-trip ticket. Many countries require proof of a return flight; they may not issue your visa or allow you to enter with a one-way ticket.
- Review the refund and change of date policy when purchasing your airfare. It is very common for students to change their travel plans before coming home
- It is recommended that you consider purchasing travel insurance through the airline or travel agent. Be sure to read what the policy will cover expenses (e.g., lost baggage, change of travel dates for covered reasons, etc.)
- Typically, you will need to check-in online 24 hours in advance for your flight
- Shop around! Spend some time checking with different airlines before settling on a ticket. A website to get you started that works with students is studentuniverse.com
- You may also contact the airline directly or work with a travel agent

ENTRY & CUSTOMS

Immigration and Customs Inspections

Once you arrive in your host country, you will be required to go through Passport Control and Customs. Have your passport ready, any arrival documents given to you to complete on the plane, and, when required, proof of immunizations. It is important to be respectful and cooperative as you proceed through this process. The immigration official will check your documents and stamp your passport to approve entry.

Once you proceed through immigration, you will collect your luggage and go through customs. It is not unusual to have your luggage opened and searched. Your luggage may

even be x-rayed. It is also possible that you will be simply waived through without having your luggage searched at all.

- [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#) : provides information regarding regulations when traveling to and from the United States
- [Transportation Security Administration](#) : provides current information on regulations and restrictions on transportation, including air travel

DO NOT MAKE ANY JOKES ABOUT BOMBS OR SMUGGLED ITEMS. This is taken very seriously by security officials and even joking about this will cause you serious delays.

Confirmation of Arrival

Once you arrive and have settled in, be sure to contact your family to confirm your safe arrival. Before you depart, be sure to let your family know you may not be able to call immediately after landing and ask them to allow 24-48 hours for you to be in touch. You may not have internet access at the airport or immediately once in your accommodation.

We recommend that you leave your family and/or friends your flight itinerary. They can use that information to check the airline website to see that the plane arrived safely.

Shortly after arrival to your destination, please log into your online My Study Abroad account and fill in your overseas contact information under "Address Abroad". This will ensure we have the correct contact information in case of an emergency.

BEING ABROAD

Balancing Study and Free Time

It is very exciting to be abroad and natural to want to explore new places and cultures. It is important to remember that your primary purpose for participating in a study abroad program is to study which means attending classes and completing your coursework. Other goals that you may want to achieve and get out of your study abroad experience are also important, but you will need to balance your academic, co-curricular, and personal goals. Global and intercultural learning is an important aspect of study abroad that take place both in the context of your structured program (class, internship, research projects, etc.) as well as during your time exploring and making new friends.

Be sure to consider your schoolwork when planning your excursions. Remember, all courses taken abroad are for academic credit and will be counted in your CMU GPA. A great way to incorporate travel into your study abroad experience is to visit local sites during the regular term and travel to distant places during school breaks or after your program has ended.

Tips for Balancing Study and Free Time

Create a study schedule

- Get to know the expectations, schedule, and assignments listed in your course syllabi
- A daily schedule to manage your workload in a new academic context and new life may be very helpful in managing your class and study time and free time for cultural exploration and fun

Partner up with a study group

- Find a study group to join or take the initiative to create one
- A study group will help you to adjust to the new academic environment, feel less lonely, and be part of a support group during those times you will need to prioritize study
- Study groups are also good opportunities for intercultural learning as you work with new colleagues at the university who can help you to navigate the teaching and student culture

Accountability Buddy

- It is helpful to have a colleague in your classes that you can trust to help keep you on track when the going gets rough. You can do the same for them too!

Make your extra-curricular travel intentional

- Learning is always intentional! While studying abroad, you will be surrounded by a wealth of cultural and intercultural learning as well as personal growth opportunities
- Do your research and try to intentionally plan free time explorations so you can get the most out of your experience abroad

Making time to relax and spend time with friends.

- You are abroad to primarily study and learn, but it is equally important to make time for rest, relaxation, and simply ‘taking it all in’

Exercising and eating healthy

- Exercising and eating healthy will help you be more focused in your classes and have more energy
- It can also help to calm your nerves and lower your stress levels
- You may consider joining a gym or intramural sports

LODGING ABROAD

Homestays

If your program has arranged lodging in homestays, you will have a unique experience and insight into the host culture. Homestays provide an opportunity for both cultural and language immersion. The host family will be a good source of information about local life and culture. In the context of language learning, speaking the local language to your host family will help you improve your language skills and learn colloquial words and phrases. The host family will also be part of your support system. To get the most out of the experience, you should spend time with and get to know your host family. As a guest, you should respect the rules they have set for their home. As you get to know the host family and they get to know you, the homestay experience will become more rewarding for you and them. Remember, you are learning from them as much as they are learning from you.

Hostels

If you decide to do independent traveling during your time abroad, be sure to carefully plan your travels ahead of time. In many parts of the world, hostels are a less expensive, "no-frills" alternative to hotels. Sleeping may be dormitory-style (everyone in bunks in one room) or private rooms.

Each hostel has different rules and restrictions, from imposing a curfew to establishing strict check-in and check-out times. Some hostels require that you bring linen, while others require you to have a Youth Hostel Membership; so be sure to check on regulations in advance and read reviews of past guests. Early arrival at hostels is recommended as they tend to fill up quickly in popular destinations.

TRANSPORTATION ABROAD

Public Transportation

Once you arrive at your program location, you may wish to independently explore the country or region. You will find that there may be multiple ways to undertake your exploration with varying levels of cost. Local public transportation systems are usually the most cost-effective alternative.

There may be several options for public transportation at your destination: local buses, trams, subway and monorail, passenger ferries, and, of course, taxis and ride-hailing services. Do some research on local and regional transportation before you set out on the program so that you know what to expect.

Air Travel

Major international airlines may offer flights within a specific country or region. However, it is usually the case that major international airlines charge higher airfare. There may be reputable regional airlines (e.g., in Europe, regional carriers are Ryan Air and Easy Jet) that offer low-cost, no-frills flights to major destinations. When making an airline reservation abroad, keep the following points in mind:

- Be aware that regional carriers will generally have stricter luggage rules relative to major international and US carriers (e.g., charge for checked luggage, one carry-on item, etc.)
 - Be sure to check the baggage rules, including carry-on, in advance
- Confirm the airport name (as opposed to the city name) that your flight will fly into. Don't assume that you will fly into a city's major airport and may instead fly into a regional airport.
- Be sure to research transportation options at your arrival airport.
 - Whenever possible secure transportation from the airport into town ahead of time.
- Read the "fine print" before booking a ticket regarding delays, rebooking, cancelation, and refunds.

Train/Rail

As opposed to the United States, trains are a convenient and relatively inexpensive (sometimes cheaper than air travel) form of travel within many countries or a region in many parts of the world. Some train systems may even provide student discounts (when you show your student ID) available that will make the exploration of the destination country more accessible for you.

Some tips that may help you with rail travel:

- You may need to purchase a ticket in advance, with a reserved seat, to ensure that you have a place on the train. Some train systems may require you to purchase a ticket as well as a separate seat reservation.
 - Be sure to ask what is required when making your purchase.
- Limit the amount of luggage you take. This will make train transfers with a limited amount of time and stairs to climb much easier.
 - Large suitcases can typically be stored in luggage racks at either end of the train car but will be out of your sight.
 - Luggage racks above your seat will be small and hold carry-on size luggage.

Subways/Overground

In many major cities, subway systems offer a convenient and inexpensive way to get around. In many systems, you will be able to purchase a single-use ticket or a pass that will allow you unlimited use of the subway for a specific time (day, week, or month). Some cities will also have student discounts that you may be able to take advantage of by presenting your University I.D. at the time of purchase.

*In many cities, underground (subway) and overground transportation systems may have their local often unique names. In Paris, the subway system is called the **Metro**, while in London it is called the **Underground** (colloquially referred to as the **Tube**), which is distinguished from the London **Overground**, a suburban*

*rail network serving London and its suburbs); the Berlin underground system is called **U-Bahn**. Some transportation systems are referred to by the systems initials: in Bangkok, it is called the **BTS Skytrain** (Bangkok Mass Transit System) or just Skytrain.*

Some things to keep in mind when using the subway/overground system:

- Hours of operation.
- Carry your subway ticket with you
 - In some systems, such as Vienna or Rabat's Tram System, which do not have a gated entrance system, you are required to have your subway pass at all times when using the system; police officers may request to check its validity at any time
 - If you don't have the subway pass, you may be fined on the spot or taken to the subway system's main station to be issued a citation
 - In some systems, such as Berlin's, you must validate your ticket before boarding. Typically, the machine that validates your ticket is on the platform. An unvalidated ticket could result in a fine
- Pay attention to your upcoming stop. In some systems, doors close fairly quickly, and you may miss your opportunity to disembark
- Pay attention to the process of boarding and disembarking from the train
 - In some countries, like England and Japan, the boarding process is highly ordered; those getting ready to board the incoming train line up and do not board until passengers disembarking have exited the train
 - In other places, this process may be relatively disorganized and a bit chaotic
- Observe local customs around noise level and the appropriateness of offering your seat to others
- Be aware of the opportunity for pickpocketing in crowded subway trains

Bus

If you are in a city, bus systems may be extensive. However, if you live in the suburbs, buses may not run as often, and you may have to find alternative methods to get around. Most city bus systems offer smartphone apps that allow you to keep track of when your next bus is coming, which can be extremely useful.

Licensed Taxis and Ride-hailing Services (Uber, Lyft, and their local versions)

Taxis and ride-hailing services may be the most convenient modes of transportation but may also be the mode of transportation that will have the most impact on your budget.

Driving Abroad

CMU strongly discourages students from driving in a foreign country. Rules of the road may be different. For example, in some countries, you may have to drive on the opposite

side of the road from where you normally drive, which may make driving more challenging and potentially dangerous. You may also be required to obtain a local driver's license or International Driver's License, and you will be subject to all local driving laws and penalties. You will need to purchase insurance coverage in a foreign country.

COMMUNICATION ABROAD

Cell Phones

Before you leave, check with your phone provider to make sure that your phone can be used internationally.

Research International Travel Plan

- Contact your cell phone provider to decide the best way to arrange your phone plan. Every company will provide different levels of coverage for other countries, so it is important to determine if your current phone and/or plan will work abroad.
- If your phone/plan will not work internationally, it might be cost-effective to purchase a temporary international travel phone with service at your destination.

Replace Your SIM Card

- You may find it cheaper and easier to use your phone by purchasing a SIM card in-country. SIM cards can usually be easily transferred from one mobile device to another. It will mean that you will also get a new, local phone number.

Turn Off Your Cellular Data

- If you decide that an international phone plan is too expensive, be sure you turn off roaming and data on your phone when you are abroad. This will limit both use of the battery of your phone, as well as the extra charges that may occur if your phone goes into roaming.
- Turning on your WIFI option will let you connect to local WIFI spots. While this may limit your tools of communication, it will be an effective way to keep your overall cost down.

IF you lose your phone abroad...

1. Activate the "Find My Phone" feature.
2. Use a roommate or friend's phone to call yours.
3. Retrace your steps.
4. Contact your current phone carrier.

IF you are not able to find your phone...

1. Change passwords, especially for those apps and websites on your phone that give access to important information (banking and other personal information).
2. Remote erase your phone (you will want to contact your current phone carrier for information on how to do this)

Ways to prevent your phone from being lost...

1. Make sure you activate the lock code on your phone.
2. Ensure your “Find my Phone” and “Lost Phone” mode have been activated to use in case your phone is lost or stolen.
3. Back up your phone before you travel. This will help in the case of a lost phone and transferring your data to a new one.
4. Contact your current phone carrier to see if they offer any international insurance programs.

Before travel, ensure you have a hard copy list of emergency contacts (in case you do not have access to your phone for whatever reason).

1. Know what the equivalent of 911 is in whatever country you are studying.
2. Know where the nearest US Embassy or Consulate is located--at your program location or while you are traveling--and their contact information.

RE-ENTRY TO THE USA

Duties and Tariffs

When you return to the United States, you will need to declare any souvenirs or gifts that you purchased while you were abroad. There is a monetary limit on the amount of goods you can bring into the United States, without paying taxes. All items that you either purchased or acquired while abroad will have to be declared on the declaration form you will be given to complete on the return flight that you will hand to a U.S. Customs official after landing.

For further information and monetary limits, you can review the U.S. Customs' publication [Know Before You Go](#).