Texas A&M International University

Study abroad and experience the world.

Study Abroad Handbook

Office of Student Affairs
International Engagement
956.326.2282 | STC 226
www.tamiu.edu/international
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Student Rules & Regulations

Student Handbook

Each student enrolled at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) is responsible for being fully acquainted and complying with TAMIU’s Student Handbook. You can find this handbook online at http://www.tamiu.edu/studentaffairs/StudentHandbook1.shtml. Study abroad students should familiarize themselves in particular with the following sections:

- Student Rights and Responsibilities
- Student Code of Conduct and Violations
- Disciplinary Procedures
- Academic Conduct

Study abroad programs are University-sponsored activities and, as such, all of the terms and conditions of student conduct as outlined in the Student Handbook apply to study abroad students. By accepting admission to a TAMIU study abroad program, you agree to be responsible for your own health, safety and behavior while participating in the program. In addition, you commit to observe and obey the TAMIU Student Handbook and Student Code of Conduct, the laws of the State of Texas and the United States of America, as well as the laws of the host country and host institution.

Due Process and Dismissal

Violations of any of the conditions set forth by TAMIU’s study abroad programs may result in expulsion from the program and forfeiture of program fees. If, for just reason, the faculty coordinators consider you to be continually disruptive, or in violation of university rules and regulations, disciplinary action will be taken and you may be dismissed from the program. Just reason includes violations of your student responsibilities, conditions set forth in the Student Handbook/Code of Conduct, and/or the laws of the United States and your host country. You will be afforded due process (in accordance with the Student Handbook), which includes an opportunity to respond to charges against you.

Prior to taking action which adversely impacts a student’s participation or status in a study abroad program, the faulty member must:

- Provide notice to the student about the nature of the problem.
- Give the student an opportunity to respond (explain) and correct the problem.
- Communicate the consequences of failing to correct the problem, i.e. dismissal from the program.
Arrest for violations of host country laws may result in your immediate dismissal from the program. TAMIU will assume no responsibility for finding the student legal counsel. The faculty coordinator will contact the Office of Student Affairs (OSA), alert the US Embassy, and notify the student’s family of the arrest, in accordance with FERPA Guidelines.

**Title IX: Sex Discrimination and Harassment**

Title IX of the Education Amendments and TAMIU rules prohibit discrimination in educational programs and activities offered by the University based upon sex. Sexual harassment, including sexual violence, is a form of sex discrimination and is therefore prohibited under Title IX. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it unreasonably interferes with a person’s work or educational performance or creates an intimidating or hostile environment.

The following are examples of types of conduct that may constitute sexual harassment:

- Inappropriate touching, patting, or hugging
- Nonconsensual sexual activity
- Invasion of sexual privacy
- Obscene phone calls, texts, emails, photographs, or gestures

Any person (student, faculty, staff, or guest) who believes that discriminatory practices have been engaged in based upon sex may discuss their concerns and file a complaint of possible violations of Title IX with the TAMIU Associate VP for Student Affairs or with the Office of Civil Rights (Dallas Office), U.S. Department of Education, 1999 Bryan Street, Suite 1620, Dallas, TX, 75201-6810, (214) 661-9600.

Incidents may be reported to:
Mr. Jerry Alva
Associate VP for Student Affairs/ Title IX Deputy Coordinator
Student Center, Room 226A
Phone: (956)326.2284
Gerardo.alva@tamiu.edu
Culture Shock and Host Culture Awareness

Culture Shock

When you are abroad remember that you are the visitor/foreigner. It is your responsibility to adapt to your new environment, different social courtesies, eating habits, and customs. That means that you must first make yourself aware of cultural differences. Adapting to local customs is not only good manners, it is often more comfortable and opens doors to new friendships!

It is very common to experience an initial high over the excitement of the new followed in a few days or weeks by a big low and then have things level off as you settle in and enjoy the differences. It is also very common, but often less anticipated, to go through this same cycle upon your return home (see also page 25: Reentry). By being aware of the culture shock process, you can understand your emotional changes and adjust accordingly. If you are in a real ‘low’ then seek out other students from home to talk about home and the things that you are used to.

Stages of Acculturation

Characteristics of the Honeymoon Stage:
You are busy taking care of business (registration, apartment, bank account, etc.). You are observing the new culture and familiarizing yourself with the new environment. You are meeting useful and friendly university staff.

You are making your first social contact with members of your host culture. You are seeing and doing new things and enjoying a new world. You may be enjoying increased material comfort.
You have a feeling of excitement, adventure, and optimism.
You feel proud that you can make yourself understood in the target language and that you can understand native speakers.

Characteristics of the Conflict Stage:
You begin to desire more personal relationships with members of the host culture. You find you have little time of opportunity to make friends.
You are feeling isolated, out of place.
You may feel tired, sick, depressed, angry, or frustrated.
You have a growing awareness that your home culture’s behaviors may not be accepted in the host culture, and you may have to give up, suspend, or modify your own behavior.
Your high expectations remain unmet.
You blame the host culture for your problems.
You spend lots of time with members of your home culture complaining about the host culture. You experience problems with the subtleties of the target language.

Characteristics of the Recovery Stage:
You choose to become an —explorer!— in the new culture.
You accept the challenge of self-reflection.
You assume responsibility for your own cultural adjustment.
Your language skills improve noticeably.
You begin to understand why members of the host culture do what they do.
You have finally made friends.
You feel part of the community.
You develop a greater tolerance for what is strange and new in the host culture.
You become a mediator between the two cultures.

Host Culture Awareness
As you go through the cycle of adjustment, your awareness of the host country culture naturally increases.
This awareness tends to progress through a series of levels, described below.

I. Unconscious incompetence This has also been called the state of blissful ignorance. At this stage, you are unaware of cultural differences. It does not occur to you that you may be making cultural mistakes or that you may be misinterpreting much of the behavior going on around you. You have no reason not to trust your instincts.
II. Conscious incompetence  You now realize that differences exist between the way you and the local people behave, though you understand very little about what these differences are, how numerous they might be, or how deep they might go. You know there's a problem here, but you're not sure about the size of it. You're not so sure of your instincts anymore, and you realize that there are some things you don’t understand. You may start to worry about how hard it's going to be to figure these people out.

III. Conscious competence  You know cultural differences exist, you know what some of these differences are, and you try to adjust your own behavior accordingly. It doesn't come naturally yet—you have to make a conscious effort to behave in culturally appropriate ways—but you are much more aware of how your behavior is coming across to the local people. You are in the process of replacing old instincts with new ones. You know now that you will be able to figure these people out if you can remain objective.

IV. Unconscious competence  You no longer have to think about what you're doing in order to do the right thing. Culturally appropriate behavior is now second nature to you; you can trust your instincts because they have been reconditioned by the new culture. It takes little effort now for you to be culturally sensitive.*

*This paradigm is based on work by William Howell.

Cross-Cultural Adaptability Pointers

What you can do to rebound from unpleasant feelings of being in an unfamiliar setting and how to react positively to new experiences, to build your self-confidence and tolerance for ambiguity:

* Develop a friendship with somebody who is culturally different; do something new - food, dance, or hobby.
* Move out of your ―safe zone‖, experience the unfamiliar and accept your ability to function in a —less than perfect way.!
* When you experience unpleasant feelings when you interact with culturally different persons analyze your thoughts, what expectations are not being met?
* Keep a journal in which you discipline yourself to write positively about yourself and your abilities.
* Work on your sense of humor; develop the ability to laugh at yourself.

What you can do to become comfortable with differences, become more tolerant and inquisitive:

* Learn more about persons who have different opinions/values than you, don’t be judgmental, and look for positive attributes.
* Focus on accepting and respecting others, with less focus on impressing others.
* Make time for —solol activities.
* Focus on expanding your activities – trying ethnic restaurants or listening to different music.
* Learn how foreigners perceive Americans.

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What you can do to become more attentive to (non) verbal behavior. Develop a sensitivity to nuance, tuning into what others are thinking:

* Practice —Active listening.
* The meaning of —no.
* Read about the psychology, culture, and communication style of the target group.
* Develop a friendship with a member of the target culture in order to achieve the above.
* Observe your, and others body language, ask questions, and verify your understanding of what is communicated.
* Watch TV with no sound, to heighten awareness of non-verbal communication.

How to develop your personal autonomy, by not being overly dependent on environmental clues for their identity (a clear sense of self), respect for self/others, self motivating and managing:

* Write an essay or make a list of your most important values, consider: love, privacy, independence, wealth, and health.
* Act on your values by establishing matching behaviors.
* Learn to respect and support others who hold different values from yours.
Travel

By Air

In many countries, when you arrive from an international flight you will be required to submit an arrival card. These cards are typically passed out on the flight near your time of arrival and are readily available at the point of entry. It is best to have your information on hand and fill these cards out in advance to passing through customs in order to not delay your travel. Common information you are required to submit is your name, nationality, arrival and departure dates, address you will be residing (university dorms/hotel/homestay etc.), purpose for travel, imported items, and recent illnesses.

Student Travel Association (www.statravel.com) is a good source for reduced fare tickets, as well as Student Universe (www.studentuniverse.com) or Travel Zoo (www.travelzoo.com). Some student air fare sites will ask you for your International Student ID Card (www.myisic.com) number when purchasing the fare. The ISIC card can be purchased at International Engagement (STC226) at a cost of $25 p/card. Don't forget to search any of the non-student fare discount sites, such as Travelocity (www.travelocity.com), Orbitz (www.orbitz.com), Expedia (www.expedia.com), and Kayak (www.kayak.com). Be careful that you do not schedule layovers that are too short to catch a connecting flight and also be aware of all restrictions (non-refundable, non-transferable, etc.) on a particular ticket. With increased airport security measures, check in for any international flight at least 2 or 3 hours ahead of flight time and be sure you understand the latest requirements regarding carry-on items (www.tsa.gov).

Discount airlines in Europe now provide inexpensive and timely ways to travel long distance for a number of smaller airports throughout Europe. Some examples of these discount airlines are Ryan Air and Easy Jet. Do keep in mind that different luggage restrictions apply to these airlines, so you will be limited in what you can take with you without having to pay steep fines.

By Ground

Check Rail Europe (www.raileurope.com) to find out all you need to know about train travel in Western Europe. The Eurail Select Pass can be an outstanding deal, but make sure that you are going to travel enough within qualifying periods to justify its cost. The Eurail Pass is a cost savings if you are planning to travel long distances (more than 4 hrs) for a number of times. The pass must be purchased while you are still in the U.S. as they will be mailed to you. The passes may not be used in the United Kingdom or in most East European countries. Students normally buy 2nd class passes, which is fine in Western Europe. For some trains there may be a need to reserve seats in advance. There is a nominal charge for this. For the United Kingdom, see www.eastcoastrail.co.uk, www.thetrainline.com, and http://www.nationalrail.co.uk. Also see Dan Youra's Ferry Guide (www.youra.com/ferry) for information on European railway and ferry systems.
Renting cars in Europe is more expensive than in the US and may have different age requirements. Typically larger security deposits will be held on your card and gasoline prices are higher. Also realize that traffic signs and regulations can vary greatly (think about driving on the left side of the road in the U.K.). Traffic accidents account for the majority of injuries and deaths among students abroad. If you plan on driving, purchase a driver’s guide for your destination.

It is recommended that you learn the public transportation system. In your city of residence you can probably get monthly passes. Also, you may purchase shorter stay tickets in bulk, e.g. ten Paris Metro tickets, the Paris one-day or three-day pass, or the London one-day travel card are often available at reduced prices.

In Latin America, bus travel is the main mode of transportation. One usually must buy tickets to popular destinations ahead of time (at least the day before). Bus passes do not exist in most countries, but bus use is generally inexpensive. Take as little luggage as possible on Latin American bus trips — stored luggage has a higher chance of being stolen. Always watch your luggage being loaded under the bus (if someone offers to take your bags to load them, you might not see them again!)

Preferences will vary by your location in Asia. For Japan, you will want to have an idea of where you are planning to travel and the train lines you will likely use so you can compare the price of your individual tickets with the rail pass for the best deal. For most routes and price estimates, you can use online direction services such as Google Maps. Tourists may get 7, 14, or 21-day Japan Rail (JR) passes online that will save you from dealing with ticket purchases. However, there will be some line restrictions, including private lines and shinkansen — bullet trains. For guidelines on rail tickets in China, visit http://www.travelchinaguide.com/china-trains/ticket-service.htm and always carry your passport as foreigners are often required to present them upon in-person ticket purchases.

**Overnight Stay**

Youth hostels are still the 1st choice of students to see Europe inexpensively. In fact, hostels are available in many countries outside of Europe as well. It is recommended that if available, you book via an accredited hostel from http://www.hihostels.com. Do read reviews for all of your prospective accommodations. Some destinations will not have hostels available, but do not shy away from alternate accommodations such as inns and bed & breakfasts. You will often get a better deal than a brand name hotel and a richer local experience.

**Guidebooks**

Absolutely learn about your host country before you go there. Get your hands on travel books, such as the *Let's Go Europe* (www.letsgo.com). If you are going to travel more intensively in a particular country, there are volumes in the Let's Go... series for several major countries, i.e. *Let's Go Europe* combines about 10 popular Western European countries. Also recommended travel books are the *Frommer's EasyGuide* and the *Rick Steves* series. You may also
consult the Lonely Planet series as an additional travel source. Also, visit on-line student created Stowaway travel magazine (http://stowawaymag.com/) and search for your country to read about their experiences.

**Passport and Visas**

For all study abroad programs you will be required to have a valid passport. If you do not have a passport yet, you can pick up an application at Office of Student Affairs or go to the U.S. Department of State website to complete one online and print it (www.travel.state.gov). The cost of obtaining the passport is approximately $110, and it will take about 4 - 6 weeks for standard processing once received. You may submit your completed application along with supporting documents to International Engagement, which is an approved passport processing center (call 956.326.2282 for appointments). If you already have a passport, please check well in advance that it has not, or will not, expire in the period that you will be abroad.

You will be required to submit a copy of the identification page of your passport to International Engagement and it is recommended you leave a copy as well with your family. In case you lose your passport while abroad, report it to the local police. Get a written confirmation of the report, and take the following documents (two extra passport pictures, passport number, date and place of issue, and a certified - NOT photocopied! - copy of your birth certificate or an expired passport) to the nearest American Embassy or Consulate and apply for a new passport. If you have further questions you can call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778.

Be sure that you understand all visa restrictions and requirements for your host country. Even in countries where visas are not required, such as Chile or Argentina, you may need to get a visitor's card or permit prior to or at arrival. Check with the appropriate consulate or embassy for detailed information. You can access the Department of State Consular Information Sheets, with details of visa requirements and links to foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S, by typing in your destination country on the www.travel.state.gov home page.

**Health and Travel Insurance**

All students who participate in a TAMIU approved study abroad program are required to purchase international health insurance for the duration of their study abroad program. Check what is included in your program cost as some programs include international insurance. The required health insurance coverage can be purchased through International Engagement and covers the following: basic and major medical expenses, emergency medical reunions, repatriation, security evacuation, accidental death & dismemberment, medical, travel, and technical assistance along with related return ticket, program fee, and delay expenses. Students going on an ISEP exchange program must purchase the ISEP insurance unless your host country requires an alternate plan.
What to Pack?

The majority of study abroad programs take place in countries where the weather is colder than Laredo. If going to Europe, expect a longer winter, although actual temperatures in most of Europe won’t be nearly as low as they often are in the northern tier of the United States. Many countries tend not to heat buildings and residences as warmly as is customary in the United States and the use of air conditioning during the summer is not as common. Adapting to the local customs can help you become more comfortable. For instance, Europeans wear hats, gloves, scarves and layer clothing because it is often cold outside. Also be aware of local dress codes. Other countries may dress more formally or conservatively than Americans. Research the norms for your destination. This will also help you avoid unwanted attention and labeling yourself as a tourist.

Pack lightly. Most American students find that they have taken too much luggage. Just carry your suitcase around the block three times, and then re-pack! When hauling your luggage through train stations, up and down the stairs, etc. you will quickly regret having packed that extra pair of shoes.

Some packing tips from study abroad students:
- If you hate to lose it, don’t bring it.
- Do not take valuable jewelry.
- Leave extra space in your bags for things you want to bring home or be prepared to mail it home.
- Never pack essential documents, medicine, or anything you could not do without in your checked luggage.
- Never carry large amounts of cash.
- Take only the credit cards you will use on the trip.
- Keep a separate list of credit/debit cards and emergency replacement contact number and procedures.
- Keep your insurance information on you at all times.
- Mark all luggage -inside and out- with your name and address. Mark your bags in some distinctive way, so they are easily found. Purchase TSA approved locks for luggage and backpack.
- Contact lens solution and an extra pair of lenses
- Special medication (any prescriptions you may need, in labeled bottles with a written prescription)
- A small backpack for day trips
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Address book
Money Matters

Get some currency of the country to which you are going before leaving the United States so that you don't have to worry about this upon arrival at the airport. Make sure you request this foreign currency at your bank a few weeks before your departure, since they are not likely to have it readily available. Purchasing currency at the airport is not recommended due to the high exchange rates. If you were not able to get the foreign currency do not worry, there are typically many opportunities to withdraw cash.

Often the easiest way to get foreign currency in a hurry is to present an eligible VISA or MasterCard in a bank or exchange bureau. You will also find automatic teller machines (ATM) that will accept your VISA, MasterCard or American Express cards. Make sure your cards are eligible for ATMs and cash advances. You can contact the ATM networks on which your cards are valid and ask for their list of international locations or at least their availability where you are going. Don't forget to memorize your pin number and ask your bank what their withdrawal fees are for foreign ATM transactions. You must notify your bank or card company if you will be using your credit/debit card internationally to avoid security holds being placed on your account. Always be aware of your credit limit and withdraw limit. We strongly advise you to divide your checks, money, and records between separate locations in your luggage and on your person (not everything in your wallet!) so you will have an instant reserve if something is lost.

CREDIT CARDS - In many countries VISA and MasterCard are valid almost as broadly as in the United States (the only exception being that credit cards are less frequently accepted in smaller businesses and restaurants and in the small hotels students often use). One convenient use is for rail tickets. Exceeding your maximum allowable credit or using a canceled card may be viewed more seriously abroad than in the United States. Be sure to arrange for someone to pay your credit card bills while you are gone or pay them online.

CHECK CARDS/DEBIT CARDS - A ---bank debit card, more often called a ---check card, is a card that looks and functions exactly like any VISA or MasterCard credit card and can be used with exactly the same businesses, banks and ATM machines. However, your cash advances (and purchases) will not accrue interest because the card transaction is drawn directly against your bank's checking or savings account instead of being posted to a credit card account for later payment. Check with your bank for foreign transaction fees. AAA offers a travel card at a minimal charge which acts similar to a debit card and has some additional benefits: http://ww1.texas.aaa.com/en-tx/products/Pages/foreign-money.aspx.

EXCHANGE RATES - Banks normally have better exchange rates than currency exchange shops (including airports) or hotels (the worst!). An advantage of paying with credit cards is that their charges are converted a 1% over the official rate -- the rate you see in the newspaper but never at any bank counter.
The range of foreign coins includes some with larger cash value than in America, and coins are much more extensively used in many countries. Large banks can handle exchange, but a currency exchange business may be more helpful because you may be able to get coins as well as paper. Coins may immediately be needed for tips, bathrooms, telephones, etc.

TRAVELER’S CHECKS may get a slightly better rate than cash, but are no longer commonly used. Many businesses do not continue to accept them and local banks overseas usually charge a transaction fee to cash these checks. You can avoid this fee by cashing them at a local branch of the issuing agency. If you are going to Great Britain, finding a source for Thomas Cook’s travelers’ checks may be helpful, since the many Cook’s agencies will change them without a commission. Smaller shops and eating places are less likely to accept checks as cash than would be true of similar establishments in the United States, and even larger stores and restaurants may look surprised.

Though reimbursement may be as safe as portrayed in the advertisements, it is not nearly as quick unless you have with you the receipt for purchase (or a photocopy) and information regarding such details (hopefully on the receipt) as the name and address of the bank where purchased, date of purchase, and the check numbers. Leave a complete record/receipt copy in safekeeping at home, in addition to having one with you.

FOR FAST CASH, the Department of State (DOS) provides many options that you may find via the DOS website: http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/emergencies/financial-assistance.html. If all commercial options are not available to you, DOS operates the Citizens Emergency Funds Transfer Program for Americans stranded overseas (please note that this is for EMERGENCIES only). The funds are transferred to the DOS in Washington, DC, which then authorizes the appropriate US embassy or consulate to disburse the money.

In cases where no emergency is involved, American Express is perhaps the fastest transfer, but can only be sent from an American Express service center and is not available in all countries. Cost varies according to the amount being transferred, and payment is accepted via American Express, MasterCard, Visa, Discover Card, or cash. Western Union is probably more widely available (although still not available in all countries) and will accept telephone transfers using MasterCard and Visa. Transfers to major cities (such as Paris) can be done in fifteen minutes, but more remote locations take up to two business days. Cost varies depending on the amount transferred. Call 800-325-6000 or -4176 for specific information.
Communication

TELEPHONES - Using a phone abroad will vary from country to country, but many phones in Western Europe now operate with a phone card and do not accept coins. You may be able to buy cards at grocery stores, post offices, newsstands, some hotels and bars. In some countries you need a phone card or coin just to get a dial tone. AT&T (800) 331-0500, Sprint (888) 211-4727, T-Mobile (800) 866-2453, and other major US long distance providers have discounted or special rate international calling cards for college students. Students with an ISIC card can get special savings when calls are made through AT&T Direct Service. These cards are most useful for calling back to the US.

Calls to other countries are often very expensive. Make sure to obtain a list of your calling card company's access numbers in the countries you intend to visit. As a matter of security, memorize your phone card number and access codes so that you do not have to read from the card as you dial. You should memorize any emergency numbers, including your program and director's phone! You also might be able to use your personal cell phone while you are abroad. Check with your mobile provider on what options you have and its cost. Now, there are a number of free or low cost smart phone applications that will allow you to communicate such as Line, Voxer, Tango, Viber, Whatsapp, or Text Now.

Small Appliances/Electricity

Electrical current in European and most other countries is 220V (240V in Britain). Major exceptions include North and Central America, the Northern tier of South America, and also several East Asian countries, where current may vary by district or city -- check any non-European destination specifically. You can buy a converter and a set of adapter plugs at drug stores, electronic stores, online, and department stores (luggage or personal appliances/electronics sections). One commercial firm, Voltage Valet, has a very complete web site at www.voltagevalet.com that provides information by country. Batteries are made in standard sizes worldwide however; they may be more expensive abroad than in the US, so take a supply.

Check the usability of anything before you carry or ship it. When deciding whether to bring your computer, remember also that a computer adds weight to your luggage and is a prime target for theft. There are computer facilities at most of the partner universities and at many program offices, as well as internet cafes.
Medical and Health

Good health is a prerequisite to an enjoyable stay abroad and crucial while you are traveling. You may be exposed to unfamiliar climates, food, medicine, and health care systems. In many cases, a good measure of common sense and a healthy respect for your own body (and its limitations) will help avoid medical problems. Prevention is key in having an enjoyable experience abroad.

Assess your Health/Identify your Health Needs

Visit your physician for a check-up before going abroad. Remember to describe allergies, disabilities, psychological treatments, dietary requirements, and medical needs so that adequate arrangements can be made. Share this information not only with your physician, but inform International Engagement. Resources and services for people with disabilities vary widely by country and region so you will need to know ahead of time what accommodations can and will be made to assist your disability. You may contact TAMIU Disability Services for assistance in meeting your needs while abroad. If you have any special medical problems, you should take a copy of your medical records or dental records with you. With advanced notice, the program may be able to provide you with contact information on appropriate medical specialists. Be sure you discuss this with your own physician and take copies of all relevant medical records.

Check Health Advisories

Contact TAMIU Health Services about immunization requirements and recommendations for your host country and check on any regional health or medical advisories. Excellent websites to visit are Department of State (http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/health.html), Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/travel), and the World Health Organization (www.who.int/ith/en). Think about questions such as: what illnesses, if any, are specific to the region; what is the quality of water in host country; customs, beliefs, and laws in the host country concerning sexual behavior and use of alcohol and drugs etc.

Pack a Medical Kit

Keep some basic medical supplies close at hand. Consider prepping a medical kit that includes items such as band-aids, alcohol pads, sunburn ointment, anti-diarrhea medication, antibacterial ointment, pain reliever. Depending on the region, you can also include water purification tablets, antihistamines, and insect repellent. Also be sure to pack regular medications and other routine health and medical products you think you may need.
**Check your Health Insurance**

You must have international health insurance while abroad. Know how your health insurance plan works, which providers have been authorized to provide services, and how the claim process works. The recommended health insurance plan is Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). This is the insurance service International Engagement will enroll you in if your program does not include insurance and there is not an alternate insurance required by your host destination or university. You may visit [http://www.culturalinsurance.com/](http://www.culturalinsurance.com/) to view plans and rates.

**When you Arrive**

Learn how to get medical help, whether routine or emergency, before the need arises. Is there a 911-style emergency number, and if so, which services does it access? Get information from the host institution you are attending about student health services and recommended physicians and other medical locations. Make sure that if you have a medical condition/needs, that your host institution is aware of those. Stay healthy while abroad. Get enough rest, eat nutritiously, and get exercise to keep your mind and body working well. Do not isolate yourself, but develop new friendships for your emotional well-being.

**Various**

If you are on maintenance medication, take a doctor's prescription for the generic name to make it easier for a local doctor to prescribe exactly the same medication and dosage. It is best to take the amount you will need for the entirety of your stay, as foreign prescription medication might not be able to be refilled at your abroad destination. For vision, take your prescription for glasses or contacts with you.

Be aware that in many countries you can buy more potent drugs over the counter than are available in this country. Allergy or cold medications are very potent for instance. You may prefer to take a supply of preferred medications with you. Carry all medication in original labeled containers showing prescription numbers and the physician's name in order to make customs easier. Remember to notify your insurance company.

Though immunizations are not required for study in most countries (your program should notify you of exceptions) you should be sure your measles, tetanus, typhoid, and typhus vaccinations are current. Check with the State Health Department for the latest advisory. You don’t want to do this at the last minute, as some vaccinations require a follow-up booster or can make you feel sick (not a fun condition to travel with).

Travelers can get sick anywhere. It is not unusual to come down with a cold shortly after arriving in a new area because you have no immunity to the local virus (you may have one when you return home, and for the same reason). Likewise, any change in water and diet can cause temporary upset. You may want to take along a small supply of appropriate medications against such an occurrence. Most people adjust quickly to the change in diet, and
soon begin to enjoy one of the best parts of travel to other countries: the cuisine! In general the rules of good health are the same as at home: eat nutritiously, get plenty of rest, wash your hands, exercise, and know something about the local conditions of any country you travel through.

As you know, AIDS HIV infection is transmitted via sexual contact or transmission of bodily fluids. Indeed heterosexual transmission is the primary mode of transmission in Africa as well as being the fastest growing mode of transmission in the US and elsewhere. Women are even more vulnerable to heterosexual transmission than are men. Appropriate quality latex condoms properly used are quite effective, but they are not a guarantee of safety. Moreover, they may be very difficult to find in some countries. Complete abstinence from high-risk behavior is your best protection and is recommended, but as an adult it is your responsibility to protect yourself in whatever activities you choose. If you might for any reason need condoms or other products, purchase them before you leave the U.S. You may receive condoms free of charge from TAMIU Student Health Services or at the City of Laredo Health Department. In all cases (both abroad and at home) be very careful with sexual contacts.
Safety

Preventive Measures

International Engagement will register students who are U.S. citizens with the Department of State to inform them which U.S. citizens are abroad, where and when. Furthermore, TAMIU Police Department is provided with a list of all students abroad, as they are your primary contact at the university during an emergency situation (see also section on Emergency).

Pay close attention during orientation sessions when you are at your on-site location abroad. Know what to do if an emergency situation emerges, and whom you should contact abroad. Keep the contact information handy (better if you memorize it), so you won’t have to search for it.

Personal safety begins with awareness. What does your attitude, dress, and body language say about your vulnerability? It continues with insight into the host culture and environment - local attitudes toward strangers, gender perceptions, values, and means of communicating. You need to be aware of what is going on in your immediate environment. STUDY, OBSERVE, & ASK.

Money and Valuables

Students should take some host country currency (for use before you find somewhere to exchange money), and an ATM/debit card or a credit card with them. Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are widely available in most large cities. When traveling to more remote areas, take local currency with you. Some debit cards and credit cards automatically have a restriction on international transactions. Check with your bank or credit card company before you depart and, if needed, have the restriction on international transactions removed.

Do not carry large amounts of cash around with you; carry major credit cards instead. Keep your passport and money safe in a money belt or small purse that can be worn underneath your clothing. Wearing a purse on the outside highlights where you keep money and valuables; moreover, it can easily be cut or ripped from your shoulder. If you do wear an outside purse or travel bag, make sure the pockets are secured by a zipper, or clasp. If possible, don’t carry a handbag at all. Wrapping rubber bands around your wallet can make it difficult for a pickpocket to remove.

Do not take valuable items on your trip. Guard carefully at all times your passport, visas, and other documents that you carry with you, and do not leave them in the outer flaps of your bags. It is better to have to dig for them the few times you will need them, than to leave them out for anyone to steal. Before leaving, make a copy of the identification page of your passport. Keep this copy separate from your passport and carry it with you at all times. If
local law does not require you to keep your passport with you, carry only the photocopy of your passport when you are out and about.

**Personal Safety**

As you are preparing for your stay abroad, remember to make preparations for your personal safety as well. While abroad, you should take the same common-sense safety precautions that you would at home: be aware of your surroundings and keep your valuables concealed. Many travelers fall victim to crimes because it is assumed they are carrying cash, and in a foreign environment, they are often easy to distract. Be prudent when meeting strangers, and listen to safety advice from your program coordinator and local residents. Remember, most incidents happen when you are careless. If you should fall victim to crime, remember that your embassy is there to help you. Every embassy and consulate has a duty officer on-call around the clock to assist in an emergency.

**When Traveling**

Make sure someone else knows your itinerary.

Keep your eyes and hands on your bags at all times. When you're distracted, you're an easy target for thieves. Do not leave your bags unattended. When you're on the telephone or reading a sign or train schedule, do not forget to keep an eye on your bags.

Be especially alert in crowds at train stations, crowded shopping areas, and tourist spots. Any place with a crowd is likely to be a place for thieves and muggers as well.

Be careful to whom you give your luggage. Sometimes thieves pose as porters or taxi drivers.

Plan your trip so that you do not arrive at an unknown town late at night without having made arrangements for spending the night.

When traveling, always sleep with your money belt or neck safe hidden under your clothing.

When you stay at a hotel, make use of the safety deposit boxes that many hotels have. Leave your passport and any money you don't expect to need that day safely locked away.

If driving, keep your car doors locked and suitcases out of sight.

Do not leave valuables in parked cars. Thieves target rental cars and cars with out-of-town or foreign license plates.

**Out on the Town**

Avoid forming large groups of foreigners. Smaller groups attract less attention.

At the same time, two are safer than one. Do NOT go with any strangers if you are alone.

Dress to blend in with the local population.
Find out which parts of town are considered risky by the locals. As at home, always stay in well-lit and well-traveled areas. Don't take short cuts through alleys or unsafe areas.

**Alcohol Abroad**

In the United States, the official legal drinking age is 21—higher than it is in other countries. Attitudes towards alcohol consumption vary greatly from country to country. Whatever the local rules and customs, use moderation and good judgment, and remember that drinking may place you at risk because it reduces your awareness and ability to judge potential dangers. Excessive consumption of alcohol has been identified as the single greatest risk factor for study abroad participants.

**Avoiding Sexual Assault**

These suggestions have been adapted from a U.S. campus pamphlet on avoiding sexual assault. They contain common sense advice relating to personal safety in any country. We often let our guard down when we're with people we know. Unfortunately, most sexual assaults involve people who know each other. These tips can help you identify danger and protect yourself in any situation.

**Basic Tools**

Stay alert.

Trust your intuition.

Avoid secluded or unknown places.

If you feel you might be in danger, you probably are. Call for help and be specific. Say "This is an attack! Call 911!" in the United States (learn the emergency number in your host country).

Be aware of the effects of alcohol and drugs. Alcohol and drugs impair judgment and increase violent behavior.

Don't be afraid to call attention to yourself or to ask for assistance.

**In Social Situations**

Do not go off alone with someone you don't know well or who makes you feel uncomfortable. Suggest staying with a group or going to a public place.

Don't leave friends alone at parties, bars, or clubs. Remember, there is safety in numbers.

Beware of selfish and aggressive comments or behavior. If a person does not listen to you, stands too close, or seems to enjoy your discomfort, she or he may not respect your limits or desires.

If you feel you may be getting into an uncomfortable situation, try to get to a safe place as soon as possible.
Always bring money for taxi fare to a safe place. Change for a phone call in case of a change of plans can be helpful as well.

Be aware of what you are drinking and how much you are drinking. Never leave your drink unattended. Be supportive of other people's limits.

Be aware that signals may not be interpreted clearly across cultures. Communicate your limits clearly; if someone is pressuring you to have sex when you don't want to, say NO clearly. Be direct and assertive.

**Self-Defense Tips**

**At home**

Always keep windows and doors locked. Never prop open doors or windows. Don't let strangers into your room or apartment.

If you observe a suspicious person, notify the police immediately.

At night, close drapes, shades, or blinds.

Never give your home address to a stranger on the phone or over the Internet. Be cautious about posting personal information on the Internet.

**While walking**

Use a steady, confident pace.

Practice being aware of your surroundings.

Lower the volume or remove your headphones, so you can hear what is happening around you.

Carry your keys in your hand, so you can get into your car or home quickly. Keys can also serve as a defense weapon if you are attacked.

Wear comfortable shoes, and don't overload yourself with books or bags.

**Law/Behavior**

Police represent the authority of the government directly in many countries. Disrespect for a police officer is read as disrespect for the government. You can be arrested and hauled off to jail for less than courteous. When there is time and circumstance permit, you may contact the program or your host family for advice on when and how to contact the local authorities.

Alcohol and drinking are treated very differently abroad generally. Many of you will find yourselves in countries where wine and beer are served as a part of meals regularly and where you are already of drinking age. For these reasons drinking does not represent a —right of passage— abroad as it often does in the US. The alcohol content of
beer may be much higher than in the United States, and you will be introduced to local liquors that are deceptively strong. Remember: drinking is usually a part of festivities, but not the object of festivities. If you get drunk, it will be written off to the fact that you are a bad mannered, immature American. It also makes you very vulnerable to theft (and worse). Driving under the influence is, in most other countries, met with much stiffer penalties (including several years of mandatory jail time) than it is anywhere in the United States. This is another one of those instances where you are very strongly advised to be somewhat conservative, especially when out in public, and to know the local law. Intoxication is usually bad manners, and it is always dangerous.

Drugs of any type and in any quantity are dealt with more severely in most countries than in the United States. If you are convicted, you face a possible sentence of 2-10 years in many countries; a minimum of 6 years hard labor and a stiff fine in some countries; the death penalty in a few countries. Just being present when someone is found to be in possession is sometimes enough to get you arrested. So, if someone else is breaking the law, LEAVE! Some Americans who travel somehow have the illusion that they are under special rules and/or the illusion that the nearest American consulate can take care of things for them. The consulate can put you in touch with a lawyer and notify your parents and visit you in jail, but cannot get you out of jail or intercede on your behalf in most circumstances. You are not a representative of the United States only. In the host country you also are a representative of your program, and with respect to your program you are directly a potential influence on the perception of TAMIU students who apply after you.

**Emergency Contact Information**

Although most students have a wonderful and uneventful study abroad experience, accidents and illnesses do happen. We like to be aware of your situation and help as much as we can. Your first attempt should be to contact your on-site program administrator. Please also contact International Engagement. If you cannot reach us, or if it is after office hours, please contact the TAMIU Police Department (TAMIUPD). TAMIUPD has a list of all students who are studying abroad, and it is open 24/7. **Collect calls will be accepted in case of emergencies.** Keep this contact information in a safe and easily accessible place (i.e. a copy in your wallet, and a copy in your apartment) at all times, so that you will always know how to get in touch with us.

Please ensure that your family members know as well who to contact in case an emergency occurs at home, and they want to get in touch with you. Before your departure, provide them with contact information for International Engagement and TAMIUPD, in addition to the contact information of the program or university abroad where you will be studying.
Texas A&M International University
Office of Student Affairs – SC226
5201 University Boulevard
Laredo, TX 78041

Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00 - 5:00 p.m. Tel. (956) 326 2282
Fax (956) 326 2279
Email: studyabroad@tamiu.edu

Or, if NOT available:

Texas A&M International University Police Department
Office Hours: 24 hours a day/7 days a week
Tel. (956) 326 2100 Emergency
Tel. (956) 326 2911
Academic Tips and Differences

One of the greatest rewards of study abroad is the opportunity to experience a different way of studying and learning. Remember that you are responsible for enrolling in your courses with TAMIU and if applicable with the host institution/program. The systems and traditions of higher education can vary greatly around the world and in the universities where we have programs. It is important that you familiarize yourself with your host institution’s grading and credit system. Be sure to register at TAMIU for the study abroad courses and hours you intend to take during your study abroad program. Verify with your home and host institution that you are in fact registered for the amount of credit hours equivalent to the ones you need at TAMIU. As part of your study abroad application you must submit your academic advisement form, if for whatever reason you decide to enroll in other courses not included on the approved academic advisement form you must immediately notify IE and your academic advisor. Failure to register and/or complete the amount of hours you registered for at TAMIU abroad will result in receiving an —F— letter grade on the missing coursework.

General Differences

In most countries, students’ degree studies are restricted to one faculty and focus no more than one or two departments, because degree students begin choosing their academic focuses in secondary school. Thus at the time students enter college, they already possess an extensive background in the subject(s) they plan to study. Whereas most U.S. colleges and universities strive to give students a well-rounded education, universities in other countries expect that students will already have a broad range of knowledge as a result of their high school education.

Each region has a different credit system than the U.S. Therefore students should take the time prior to departing and registering to learn the numbering and credit system for their home country. This pre-departure work will help to ensure that the student enrolls for the correct coursework.

Continual assessment is rare. At most universities, all or most of a class grade is based on the final exam or one large essay. Multiple-choice tests are unusual, with even science courses requiring essay exams.

Professors do not usually monitor a student’s individual academic progress. It is the student’s responsibility to keep up with the class work and to approach the professor with any problems or concerns.

New Zealand and Australia

Universities offer fewer class instruction hours per week and emphasize individual study outside the classroom. University degrees are only three years long, so degree students concentrate more heavily on one subject. A course at an Australian or New Zealand university usually combines both seminars/tutorials and lectures. You are expected to enter into discussions during the seminars and tutorials and are usually assessed on your level of class participation in addition to your regular assignments. Attendance is graded, and failure to attend the majority of lectures and tutorials can result in a professor refusing admission into the final exam and/or giving you a much lower grade.
Latin America

Students studying the same subject take all of their classes together throughout their full degree program, so they know each other well and see each other almost exclusively throughout the academic day. Because students follow a set curriculum for their area of study and do not choose which classes they want to take, most professors feel that course descriptions are unnecessary. In addition, professors do not have to present a syllabus to be approved by their departments, and they may not present one to students until class starts.

United Kingdom and Ireland

At most universities, students are not admitted to the university or college itself. Instead, students apply directly to the one or two departments in which they intend to take either a single-subject degree or a ―joint‖ (two-subject) degree. The departments accept students into the course, which is roughly equivalent to an American major.

Generally, the structure of a class combines both seminars/tutorials and lectures. You are expected to enter into discussions during the seminars and tutorials and are usually assessed by your level of class participation in addition to your regular assignments. Students work toward an overall mark for their course (degree) in history, physics, etc.

A degree program in England is three years, although many students choose to stay for a fourth-year Honor's degree. Scotland has a four-year university system, and universities in Ireland have both three- and four-year degrees systems.

Academic Responsibilities

Inform International Engagement and your academic advisor of any changes in course selection and registration. This will allow us to pre-evaluate the study abroad courses and how those may transfer back to TAMIU.

Be sure to register and/or complete the hours you registered with TAMIU while abroad. Know the credit and grading system of your host institution.

If you attending an exchange or affiliate program, within a month of program completion you must bring back your coursework and syllabi and submit it to the Office of Student Affairs. Once the official transcript is received a memo will be sent out to the academic advisor for course equivalency approval. You will receive a letter grade for all coursework completed abroad. If you do not complete the equivalent amount of credit hours enrolled at TAMIU while abroad you will receive an —F‖ for the missing courses and will not be able to retake the course(s). If you fail to submit your coursework and syllabi within a month of program completion you will receive an —FI‖ for every course taken abroad until coursework is submitted.

Upon receiving your transcript you will be asked to provide course information to International Engagement, so your advisors can determine course content and appropriate TAMIU course equivalencies.
Re-entry

How to adapt to being back home?

We know from experience of many students returning home from study abroad that it is not always easy to fit right back into the life they left at home (also known as reverse culture shock). This can be upsetting because we think we should easily adjust back to our own culture. Many students experience an adjustment period somewhat like they did when they went abroad. What do you think the steps might be? Here are some possibilities to think about; what others come to mind?

1. There is excitement at seeing everyone again, eating favorite foods, and seeing familiar places.
2. You get back into the old routines at home and at school.
3. Unhappiness, withdrawal because no one identifies with your strong feelings about your international experience which they cannot share with you; you feel you are different (more mature) than classmates, they might see you as arrogant.
4. You learn how to adapt again, including finding new friends, looking for opportunities for your international interests and keeping up your new language.
5. You find a compromised style of living that gives you some outlets for changes in yourself but still fits within what you are expected to do and your environment.

Many of the skills you have learned as a result of becoming an international student are going to serve you when you return. What are some of them? (Patience, ability to solve problems, communication skills, ability to meet new people and make friends, interest in many more things than before, etc.). Can you think of others?

Although we think it is important that you anticipate some problems about going home, it is not a good idea to dwell on them. You should have confidence in yourself to work them out, just as you have worked out the necessary adjustments to living abroad.
Thanks!

Many thanks to the various study abroad organizations and institutions for their contributions to this study abroad orientation guide. Our thanks especially go to: NAFSA, Association of International Educators; USC Center for Global Education (SAFETI On-Line Newsletter); IFSA-Butler University; International Student Exchange Program (ISEP); Trinity University, Study Abroad and Off Campus Study; Texas A&M International University, Office of Student Affairs and the TAMIU Police Department.