

# Pre-Departure Handbook

University of Southern Maine Travel Courses



Office of International Programs  
101 Payson Smith Hall  
PO Box 9300  
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(207) 780-4959  
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*Bringing the World to Mind*

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction.....                           | 3  |
| Student Responsibilities/Expectations ..... | 4  |
| Student Responsibilities                    |    |
| Emergency Contact Information               |    |
| Required Paperwork                          |    |
| Research Your Host Culture                  |    |
| Before You Leave.....                       | 8  |
| Passports                                   |    |
| Insurance                                   |    |
| Language                                    |    |
| Packing                                     |    |
| Traveling with a Disability                 |    |
| Managing Money                              |    |
| Health and Safety.....                      | 15 |
| Health Issues                               |    |
| Safety Abroad                               |    |
| Legal Issues                                |    |
| Cultural Matters.....                       | 21 |
| Personal Inventory                          |    |
| Being an American Abroad                    |    |
| Cross-Cultural Adjustment                   |    |

Dear Travel Course Participant,

Thank you very much for selecting to travel and learn with us! Recent events have made the issue of international travel and international education even more important and relevant than ever. A basic question of understanding is a play. How can people feel that way about us? Who are these strangers? Why don't they understand us better? As we ask ourselves these questions our initial reaction is to shut down and become more isolated and careful.

History tells us that the act of closing down is the very act that will prevent us from fully understanding the world in which we live. The ability to understand cultures and people around the world gives us the opportunity to become better understood. The program which you have selected will be a small step toward a world that is more welcoming, tolerant and understanding of differences. To understand something better is to fear it less.

Study abroad has been a paradox within higher education for generations. Many undergraduates claim that their most meaningful experience while in college was the period they spent in an international location. It is ironic that as an institution, one of the best things we can do for the academic and personal development of our students is to send them away. It is this process where many students discover themselves and the power of their education. We go away to discover new cultures and return understanding our own culture in a much more profound way.

This handbook was developed to assist you in your planning. It is not a tourist guide with lists of fine restaurants. It is however, a practical and useful list of items which you should consider before you depart. In some cases the information is general and more specific information for your individual trip will be provided. In other cases, the information applies to all of our programs, regardless of the location. Read it and use it as a resource for your course. It is always a much better ride when your map points you in the right direction.

Again, thank you for selecting a travel course. We look forward to learning with you!

*Larisa*

Larisa Kruze  
Assistant Director of International Programs  
Office of International Programs

**A note about this handbook:** Information in this document is subject to change without notice. It is therefore intended to serve as a guide and not as the final word on your logistical and safety issues.

## **Student Responsibilities and Expectations**

### **Student Responsibilities**

USM study abroad students assume a great deal of responsibility while studying and living in another country. They serve as ambassadors of USM by taking responsibility for their academic planning, preparing for challenges that they may face while abroad, and working to integrate into the culture of the host country. "Responsibility" is taken very seriously in the Office of International Programs. We find that those students who fully understand the scope and depth of responsibility before, during, and after education abroad are those who benefit the most from their experience abroad, and can use these skills throughout their personal and professional lives. While overseas, study abroad students will act in a responsible manner and abide by the rules and regulations imposed by the institution at all times, whether they are participating in a formal program or not. All students are advised to read the *Assumption of Risk and Release of Liability* carefully before departure for further details.

### **Emergency Contact Information**

Please share this information with a family member before you depart.

USM:

Office of International Programs

101 Payson Smith Hall

PO Box 9300

Portland, ME 04104

(207) 780-4959

(207) 780-4933 (Fax)

(207) 780-5646 (TTY)

international@usm.maine.edu

lkruze@usm.maine.edu

(207) 780-5942 (Larisa Kruze's Direct Line)

### **Required Paperwork**

All the forms and documents outlined below are required for your participation in a USM short-term travel program. It is important that you return them to The Office of International Programs as soon as possible. If any piece of requested information is not provided, you may not be allowed to participate in the program you have been accepted to.

In addition, the individual program may have requirements in addition to the forms listed here. In most cases, you will be notified by the Office of International Programs if additional forms or records are needed.

#### Required Forms:

USM Agreement/Assumption of Risk and Release of Liability

Medical and Consent Form

USM Standards of Conduct and Alcohol Awareness Form

Passport Photocopy

## **Research your Host Country**

Before you go, try to learn some of the following things about your host country. As you research your host country, keep some of these questions and thoughts in mind:

### *History*

Give a broad outline of the country's history. Name the national heroes and heroines. What is the history of this country's relationship with the United States? What are the national holidays? Can you, as a foreigner, participate?

### *Politics*

What is the current political structure of the country? Who are the major current leaders? What are the major political parties? Is military service compulsory? If so, for whom and for how long?

### *Religion*

What is/are the dominant religion(s)? Is there an official state religion (which one)? What are the important religious ceremonies, observances, holidays? Are there religious conflicts in this country?

### *Social Values*

What things are taboos in this country? What type of moral code is followed? (Christian? Islamic? Confucian?) How does this moral code influence attitudes toward drinking alcohol, drug taking, gambling, sexuality/GLBTQ and premarital or extra-marital sex?

### *Female/Male Relationships*

Are there separate societal rules for men and women? What are the rules/ norms for "romantic" relationships in this country? Do young people date? If so, are relationships formal or informal? Is public display of affection accepted? What are the social norms towards the expression of one's sexuality/GLBTQ?

### *Family*

What is the common form of marriage ceremony or celebration? What are the attitudes toward divorce? Contraception? Abortion?

### *Social Etiquette*

What are the special privileges of age or gender? When is one expected to present or accept gifts from people? What kind of gifts? How do people greet each other? Are there differences based on social status, age, gender?

### *Dress*

Is there a traditional or indigenous style of dress? If so, what does it look like? Is there a difference in dress between men and women? Who wears it and when? What is the appropriate dress for you as a foreigner? Are there special dress customs you should know about (i.e. taking off ones shoes in certain places)? What types of clothing must you have for various occasions you might encounter? Is there a more conservative way of dress when entering a specific building/religious site/sacred space?

### *Food*

What foods are most popular? How are they prepared? How much and with what utensils, if any, do people eat? (Manners, customs, etc.) Are there taboo foods that are not considered edible or not permitted for traditional or religious reasons?

### *Leisure*

What are the favorite leisure activities of adults? For young people? What are the favorite sports? Is there a national sport? How available are television and radio? What types of programming are available? When?

### *Health*

Is the water potable? What kinds of health services are available? Where are they located? Are there common home remedies for minor ailments? What are the attitudes toward folk medicine? Which immunizations are required to enter the country? Which are advisable? Are there official rules regarding usage of health insurance? What is the emergency 911 number?

### *Education*

Is education free? Compulsory to what age? Available to all? In schools, do age, sex, race, caste, and class segregate children? What kinds of schools are considered best—public, private, religious? Describe the university system. What style of teaching prevails? What is the school year calendar? What is the grading system like?

### *Daily Life*

Are prices for merchandise fixed or is one expected to bargain? How is bargaining conducted? Is it OK to touch merchandise for sale? Does touching indicate desire to buy? When does the normal workday begin and end? Is there a siesta (break) time? What is the customary time to visit friends? What is the legal age for voting, marriage, driving a car? Are there differences for men/women?

### *On Being a Foreigner in this Country*

How will your financial position/social status compare with the majority of people living in this country? Do these people generally “like” Americans? Other foreigners? How many Americans live in this country? Are the major daily newspapers generally friendly to the U.S.? When you arrive must you register with city officials? The police? The U.S. Embassy? What regulations apply to you as a foreigner? Will you need visas to travel to neighboring countries? What should you do if you find yourself in legal trouble? Are there special laws governing the activities of foreigners that you should know about?

### *Find the Information*

Although most of the information needed to answer these questions will be best understood when experienced in your respective countries, it is important to have all of these thoughts in mind. You will find that there are a number of resources for research on the internet, including:

“What’s Up With Culture” Online Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad:  
[www.pacific.edu/sis/culture](http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture)

General country specific information and travel advisories: <http://travel.state.gov>

Links to the local newspapers in your host country: [www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com)

Links to country specific information: [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com), [www.letsgo.com](http://www.letsgo.com)

Links to find out the weather in your country: [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

Voltage information: [www.voltagevalet.com](http://www.voltagevalet.com)

## **Expectations/Responsibilities Checklist**

- I have read and fully understand the *Assumption of Risk and Release of Liability Agreement*.
- I am aware of any travel advisories issued by U.S. Department of State for the countries to which I will be traveling (<http://travel.state.gov>).
- I am aware of how past and current U.S. policy has affected/affects the countries where I will visit.
- I know how to avoid confrontations over politics, religion, etc., and I know how to avoid unwanted attention by not flaunting my “American-ness.”
- I am aware of the prevailing national sentiment toward the U.S. and its citizens in the countries I will visit.
- I am aware of the laws and codes of conduct that are likely to impact me.
- I know which non-verbal behaviors are considered inappropriate or rude and which are commonly used (certain hand gestures, greeting by bowing, kissing or shaking hands, etc.).
- I am aware of the prevailing local attitudes toward, and local laws dealing with sexual harassment and sexual assault.
- I am aware of the prevailing local sentiment toward people of my cultural background, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.

## Before You Leave

### Passports:

A passport is a standard form of official documentation issued to nationals of a given country. Without a passport, you will not even be allowed to set foot in most countries. A U.S. passport for an adult over 18 years of age is valid for a ten year period.

Obtaining a passport is one of the first items that you should take care of when making travel plans. You can apply for a passport at any passport agency or at many US postal services. The closest office for USM in Portland is the US Postal Office on Forest Ave. You must apply for your passport in person, unless you are renewing an expired passport. You should plan on a minimum of 4 – 6 weeks for delivery of your passport once the passport authority has received your application. In an emergency, the passport agency can rush your application, but you will need to pay a higher fee and you may be asked to appear in person. To apply for a passport, you will need the following items:

1. A completed passport application
2. The passport application fee
3. Proof of US citizenship. This can be a certified copy of your birth certificate, a naturalization certificate or, if you were born abroad, a consular report of birth of a US citizen.
4. Proof of identity. A valid driver's license or government identification is acceptable provided that it identifies you by physical description or photograph.
5. Two identical 2x2 inch passport photographs taken within six months of applying for your passport. Most photo shops, CVS, and Mailbox Etc. will be able to take these instant photos for you.

Some countries require your passport to be valid for at least six months beyond your intended departure date from that country. We recommend renewing your passport if it will expire within six months of your return to the U.S. Never pack your passport in your checked luggage. You should always carry your passport while you travel as you may be asked to present it in several locations along your trip. Do not allow your passport to be taken from you for "safe keeping". Provide the Office of International Programs a photocopy of your passport and travel with a copy of your passport in separate place from your passport. In the event that your passport is lost, this copy will be useful to speed up the recovery process.

For more information regarding passports, please visit: <http://travel.state.gov/>

### Insurance

All participants are strongly encouraged to have medical insurance. As part of your program fee, you will receive health insurance & medevac insurance coverage through iNext ([www.inext.com](http://www.inext.com)) at the comprehensive level. You may purchase supplemental travel cancellation/interruption coverage through iNext for an additional charge. USM strongly recommends that all participants have regular health insurance to cover any injuries or illnesses as a result of your participation in a travel course program. The iNext coverage only extends



coverage for injuries or illnesses that are initially treated during the trip and it will not provide coverage for medical conditions which are considered pre-existing conditions. If you wait to receive medical attention for injuries or illnesses after you return, iNext will not cover the expenses and you will be responsible for those expenses.

There are several companies that offer short-term medical insurance and medical coverage geared towards study abroad students. You may ask the USM Office of International Programs for a list of external providers but none are endorsed by USM. Consider all of your options before you choose a plan that is correct for you.

### **Language**

Feeling nervous about going to a country where you do not speak the language is healthy, but do not let it prevent you from going! The more you can learn about language of the places you visit, the better, but you will almost always be able to communicate as long as you are patient, courteous, and have a sense of humor. You will not be expected to speak the language by the locals fluently (or at all) and any attempts will be appreciated.

Ask if the person speaks English. If they answer “yes”, you should speak slowly and clearly. Don’t raise the volume however as this may potentially be misinterpreted as a sign of hostility. Memorizing key terms such as “please,” “thank you,” “hello” and “goodbye,” in the native language is very helpful.

Communication is so much more than language. Be aware of your body posture and facial expressions as they may communicate cultural messages which are not intended. Although not knowing the language will not negatively impact your trip, there are cases where you may want an interpreter. If you encounter any legal or safety problems, finding a competent interpreter will be in your best interest. Nuances of the language can get rather complex if you are trying to deal with a situation where precision is required.

### **Packing**

Remember that the items you bring on your trip should be useful and practical. It is nearly impossible to remember everything you might need, and in the end, that should not be the goal. What you pack should be items that you will need to make your experience more enjoyable. Packing for a trip should not be an attempt to recreate your home environment either. Keep in mind that you will be responsible for carrying all these items around with you and you will need to be able to carry all of your items at the same time. The stress of traveling is made many times worse by overstuffed luggage that cannot easily be transported.

### **The golden rule here is PACK LIGHT!**

Many students ask about luggage weight. Although this is valuable information, this is really the wrong question. The real question is how much luggage you can comfortably carry around on your own. In general, you should keep your bags to twenty five pounds or less. For precise information regarding allowable size and weights and checked bag fees, visit the airline website.

Post 9/11 travel will require that all your bags be scanned and checked. Federal laws have been strengthened and fines have been increased for violations. If you attempt to bring illegal or prohibited items onto aircraft, USM is not in a position to guarantee your travel. Please be prudent and careful. For a full list of permitted and prohibited items, visit the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) website at:

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>

Please remember the 3-1-1 rule for liquids and gels. Any liquids or gels that you place in your carry-on luggage must collectively fit into a 1 quart zip-top bag and each item may not be more than 3oz. You may pack larger sized liquids and gels in your checked bag. For more details, please visit: <http://www.tsa.gov/311/index.shtm>

Packing Recommendations: This is not intended to be an all inclusive list or a required list. These are simply recommendations of items that you should consider taking:

| <b>Clothing:</b>           | <b>Toiletries:</b>        |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Walking shoes              | Prescription Medicines    |
| Flip-flops or shower shoes | Toothbrush and Toothpaste |
| Socks                      | Soap and Shampoo          |
| Skirts/trousers            | Comb and/or brush         |
| Underwear                  | Sunscreen/moisturizer     |
| Sweater/Sweatshirt         | Deodorant                 |
| Shorts                     | First aid kit             |
| Light jacket               | Contraceptives, condoms   |
| Rain Gear                  | Pain relief medicine      |
| Hat                        | Tissues                   |
| Shirts                     | Tampons                   |
| Belts                      | Razor                     |
| Bathing Suit               | Eyeglasses/contacts       |
| Bath robe                  | Cosmetics                 |

| <b>Miscellaneous:</b>   |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Camera and Film         | Umbrella                                   |
| Address Book            | Luggage locks and tags                     |
| Flashlight              | Battery operated alarm clock               |
| Pocket Calculator       | Moist Towelettes                           |
| Travel Journal          | Batteries                                  |
| Travel Books and Guides | Adapter and Voltage Converter              |
| Day Pack                | Passport (and visa if required)            |
| Laundry soap            | Tickets and Rail Passes                    |
| Insurance Cards         | Student ID and iNext Card                  |
| Plastic storage bags    | Hostel Membership Card                     |
| Money Belt              | Cash, travelers checks, credit & ATM cards |
| Hostel sleeping bag     | Sewing kit                                 |

Note: All medications should be kept in their original, labeled containers. Prescriptions medicine should also be accompanied with the prescribing physician's prescriptions. Pack any prescription medications in your carry-on bag.

### **Additional Suggestions:**

Photocopy of your passport (kept separate from your passport)

Photocopy of your prescriptions in generic form

Telephone numbers, mailing addresses, and email addresses to family and friends

Language and phrase book

Collapsible duffel bag for overflow on your way home

Extra passport sized photographs for ID cards you may need to replace while abroad

Gift items for in country hosts

This Booklet!

### **Traveling with a Disability**

If you have a disability and require accommodations, we ask that you notify the Office of International Programs or the USM Office of Academic Support for Students with Disabilities (242 Luther Bonney Hall, Portland Campus 207-780-4706, TTY 207-780-4395). Early preparations are key in developing a reasonable plan for accommodations. Please contact us as soon as possible with any question regarding your specific situation.

If you are interested in general information regarding traveling with a disability, Mobility International has several publications and newsletters that are very useful. You may contact them directly at:

Mobility International  
P.O. Box 10767  
Eugene, OR 97440  
Phone: (541) 343-1284

### **Managing Money**

We have attempted to budget our international programs as reasonably as possible. We have worked to keep the program accessible financially while not compromising your welfare or the academic integrity of the course. While the program costs (tuition and fees) often take into account a great deal of your expenses while on your program, you will be responsible for a number of out-of-pocket expenses. You should be prepared for these issues. This section is designed to provide you with options when it comes to money. USM does not have a mechanism to provide you extra cash while in country so, it is important that you plan well for this aspect of your trip.

Questions regarding your personal financial aid package should be referred to the Financial Aid Office and questions about your student bill should be directed to student billing. In general, the Office of International Programs can assist you with these areas, but we cannot intervene on your behalf.

### *How Much Money should I bring?*

It depends. Depending on your particular program, you may need to budget for food, some in-country travel, personal expenses, airport taxes, taxis, buses, etc. If you don't know what is covered in your program fee, visit the Summer or Winter Session Web site for your program or call us to request this information. As a rule, you should not plan on things being cheaper than they are here in the US. In fact, due to many countries tax structures, costs of some items such as soda or bottled water is quite a bit higher than you would find here. Budget at least 125% of what you would normally spend here for the same items. If you plan on a special night out, or accessing cultural activities that are not part of the course, you will also need to plan accordingly. Remember that you do not want to be so strapped for money that it negatively impacts your ability to be flexible. Discuss money with your faculty member who normally has a very good take on what things cost. A good current guide book will be very helpful in determining how much money you should plan on taking. It is not uncommon to budget between \$30 and \$50 per day for out of pocket expenses.

### *How do I keep my money safe?*

You should never carry large amounts of cash with you, but it is a good idea to carry a bit of American money and the currency of the country you are visiting. The safest way – not necessarily the cheapest or most efficient way – is to carry money in traveler's checks, drawn in the currency of the host country. Credit cards, debit cards and ATM cards are also an excellent alternative and give you the best daily exchange rates. Money should always be carried in a safe place on your body where it would be difficult for a pickpocket to steal. Pockets and fanny packs are not necessarily the best idea. A money belt or bag that can be concealed under your clothing is the safest way to carry money and important documents such as your passport. Money is a very personal thing and you should think through what is best for you. Rule of thumb: Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

### *Exchange Rates*

Fluctuation is the key word in currency exchange rates today, so rely on information that is current. *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and the *International Herald Tribune* all publish exchange rates. The Bentley Trading Room also has recent exchange rates which can be used for approximations in initial budget planning. The following websites have online exchange rate calculators: [www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic) and [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

Once abroad, shop around at local banks and exchange counters for the best rates. You may want to bring a small calculator to help make converting easier.

### *Exchanging Money*

The key to successful money exchange is advance planning. Try to anticipate how much money you will need for a particular country. It is costly to convert currency because each transaction carries a service charge. You can exchange money at exchange houses, banks, travelers check companies, airports, railroad stations, large hotels, and at some tourist information centers and travel agencies. Banks usually offer the best rates, but take note of any minimum amount requirements when exchanging money at a bank. Avoid changing money at tourist shops or restaurants because they usually offer the worst exchange rates. *Please note that your passport will be*

*required as identification every time you exchange money.* Using a credit card or an ATM provides for the best possible exchange rate but one must be careful for hidden charges and withdrawal fees.

### *Cash*

We suggest you carry a small amount of foreign currency (equivalent to \$100- 200) with you to use for immediate necessities such as bus and/or taxi fare, phone calls, tips, etc., once you arrive in your host country. Most banks sell major foreign currencies on the spot. Students may also convert money at the airport before departure or upon arrival abroad but this is known to be costly.

### *Banking*

Make sure your bank can provide you the services you will need while you are away. It is not a bad idea to have a family member or significant other know the name of your bank and bank account number in case you need cash deposited in your account while you are away. If this information is not available to someone here, the process becomes even more difficult to deal with. Obviously, only trust someone you know extremely well!

### *ATM cards*

ATM cards are used worldwide. The ATM card you use here in the US most likely can be used abroad and the money you withdraw will be in the local currency. Be sure to check with your local bank to make sure your ATM card can be used abroad since some companies require you to obtain an international PIN. Please inquire about the fees they will charge you for ATM transactions in a foreign country. In some cases, these fees can be as high as \$10 per use. We also recommend that you notify your bank of your travel dates and destination before you leave.

### *Traveler's checks*

The safety and convenience of traveler's checks will cost you roughly 1% of the amount you change. If they are lost or stolen, they can usually be reissued and tracked quickly. This security does reduce their flexibility. The cost of cashing and converting currency can add up very quickly. Before you purchase a particular brand of traveler's check, you may want to explore what other services the company can provide you. American Express for example will provide free tourist information to check holders in various cities around the world.

### *Credit Cards*

Historically, using credit cards for daily purchases was almost exclusively an American phenomenon. Credit cards are now widely accepted worldwide, though you may still have to rely on cash in rural areas, small villages, or in third-world countries. Some merchants require a minimum purchase amount. Credit card companies typically give the best currency exchange rates available, however some companies will charge a 2-3% foreign transaction fee on each purchase. Plan accordingly and watch out for your credit limit... it can add up very fast.

### *Wire Transfers and Bank Drafts*

These are probably the most expensive way to get money in a foreign country. It is not something we would recommend unless there is no other option. Exchange rates are not terribly favorable and the fees for processing the money are very high. Wire transfers require you to have a bank account in the country you are in, which most of you will not have!

### *In Case of an Emergency*

If you find yourself stranded abroad with no money at all, contact the U.S. embassy or consulate for suggestions, but not money. The embassy personnel are officially prohibited from furnishing cash or loaning money. However, they can suggest possible sources for financial assistance and they can cable or call someone back home to send money, deducting the cost of the cable or call when your cash arrives.

### **Before You Leave Checklist**

- My passport is up-to-date and will not expire less than 6 months from my return date.
- I have given the Office of International Programs a copy of my passport and have also made a copy for myself.
- I understand the insurance coverage that I will receive through iNext.
- I have determined the appropriate health insurance coverage based on my needs.
- I have learned a few key terms in the language of my host country.
- I am able to comfortably carry all of my baggage at the same time.
- I have reviewed and understand baggage restrictions and charges for the airlines and TSA regulations including the liquids and gels rule.
- I have packed my prescription medications in my carry-on bag and have kept them in their original labeled bottles.
- I have contacted the Office of International Programs and/or Office of Academic Support for Students with Disabilities if I have a disability and require accommodations.
- I have asked my professor and/or the Office of International Programs for recommendations on how much money I should plan to spend while I am traveling.
- I have a plan for safely keeping my money and accessing money throughout my travels.

## Health and Safety

### Health Issues

If this is your first international trip or even if you are a seasoned traveler, taking care of your health before and during your trip will be extremely helpful. Regardless of your current health status, an international trip will impact your health in some way. Time zone changes, dietary changes, environmental factors and lifestyle changes will all contribute and complicate your general health while away from home.

There is also a very important note to be made here concerning your current health before you travel. Leaving home is not a cure for health and psychological concerns that you have at home. Emotional, psychological and physical problems will not only follow you wherever you go, but there is also a reasonable chance that they will be exacerbated by the stress of travel. In some cases, people who ignore their health issues during the trip are often brought to crisis point because of the neglect. If your physical or emotional health deteriorates to the point where you are not able to participate in the program or are negatively impacting others, arrangements will be made to bring you home early. No matter how important this program is to your academic life, it is never more important than your personal health and safety.

If you are experiencing emotional, eating or substance abuse problems, consider deferring your participation in a program until you have the problem well under control. If you choose to participate in the program, speak with your doctor/therapist to devise a plan for your on-going care. The sorts of pressures that lead to eating disorders, emotional and dependency problems are only intensified when you are coping with adjustments to a new culture, language, and way of life. For your safety and well-being, it is also vital that you inform your advisor of any physical, emotional or psychological difficulties or special needs you may have.

In general, a regiment of healthy eating and exercise prior to your trip will strengthen your body and help it adjust to the many physical aspects of traveling. Rest is also key, especially the days prior to departing. A common mistake is to celebrate the eve of a departure. If a Bon Voyage party is in order, plan on having it three or four days before you leave. It will be more memorable and will not negatively impact your trip.

In regards to your health, you should consider the following:

1. **Identify and be honest with your own health needs.** Make sure you are properly rested prior to the trip. Make sure to pack any prescription or over the counter medication you might need to keep yourself comfortable. (Remember again to pack copies of your doctor's prescription as well as the generic name of your medication and dose. Since medications can be expensive abroad and it may be difficult or impossible to get the appropriate equivalent medication, we recommend that you bring an adequate supply of any prescription medications. Prescription and over-the-counter medication should be left in its original package.) If you need special accommodations, please let us know as early as possible to ensure that we are able to make the necessary arrangements for you. Plan appropriately for dietary needs while traveling. This is especially important for vegetarians

and diabetics since eateries in some areas of the world are less accommodating for these issues.

2. **Medical Alert Bracelets:** Students who have medical conditions that are not easily recognized (such as diabetes, allergic reactions to antibiotics or bee stings, heart conditions or epilepsy) should consider obtaining a medical alert ID tag. These are internationally recognized; check with your doctor or local hospital for more information.
3. **Immunizations:** Depending on where you travel, you may be required to have certain immunizations. Occasionally, immunizations will be recommended but not required. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website has country-specific immunization recommendations: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel).
4. **See your health care professional before traveling:** It is always a good idea to see your doctor, dentist, gynecologist or other health care professional before you travel. Make sure your health records are up to date and discuss medical issues that may affect your travel. If you have a specific medical condition, you should bring health records with you. Ask about an adequate supply of your prescription medication as well as information regarding the dose and the generic name of the medicine.
5. **Medical Insurance:** Before you leave, it is a good idea to contact your health plan and ask questions regarding the international coverage. Check to see if your insurance has host country providers or if there is a special process you will be required to go through when accessing your insurance. USM is not responsible to cover your medical costs while in country, therefore be informed before you leave. The iNext card covers some basic accident and sickness insurance, but this should only supplement what you already carry. Bring your insurance card with you on your trip. Contact your insurance companies and ask the following questions about your coverage:
  - Does the insurance cover students studying and traveling outside their home country?
  - What is the maximum sickness and injury benefit?
  - Are pre-existing conditions covered?
  - What is the maximum coverage for accidental death?
  - Is there coverage for emergency/medical transportation/ evacuation? If so, what is the maximum payable?
  - Does the policy cover repatriation of remains? If so, what is the maximum payable?
  - How does the policy work abroad? Do policyholders need to pay up front for medical services and submit receipts for reimbursements, or is the policy accepted in the host country in lieu of payment?
  - Consider purchasing travel insurance. Also find out if your parent/ guardian's homeowners insurance will cover your valuables while you are abroad.
6. **When you arrive in country:** It is not uncommon to feel discombobulated and a bit confused when you arrive in a new country. Jet lag also plays tricks with your body and it is not uncommon to feel its effects for days after you arrive. Excessive food or drink will



irritate the situation if you are not careful. Give yourself time to adjust to the new time zone as well as the cultural differences. Regular sleep and exercise can go a long way to helping you adjust to your new environs. If your health becomes problematic, please notify your professor as quickly as possible.

7. **Jet Lag:** Jet lag itself is not necessarily a major health issue, but on transatlantic trips, everyone will experience it. Jet lag is your body's reaction to an abrupt and rapid time change. The clock says it is one time and your body thinks it is another time. This discordance causes a variety of unpleasant side effects in your body. They can range from drowsiness or insomnia to nausea and aggravated health issues. There are literally hundreds of suggestions on how to minimize jet lag's affect. In general, prepare to depart for your trip rested and in good general health. Attempt to adjust to your new time zone as quickly as possible. Getting enough rest and exercise while avoiding excessive food and drink will go a long way toward minimizing the affects.
8. **Eyeglasses and Contact Lenses:** If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take an extra pair of glasses in case you lose or damage your original pair. In many foreign countries the contact solution is more expensive than in the U.S. and it is suggested that students remember to bring extra contact solution and extra contact holders.
9. **STDs and AIDS:** Some countries may require an HIV test before allowing you to enter. Confirm this with the embassy or consulate of your host country before studying abroad. Paper documentation may need to be presented at the airport. If you require surgery abroad and need a blood transfusion, remember that not all countries require the same standards for screening HIV-antibodies in donated blood. Red Cross offices abroad and U.S. embassies and consulates have information on safe sources of blood. If you choose to be sexually active abroad, please be careful. Although most countries sell condoms, they may not be manufactured and/or stored properly so as to provide maximum protection against STDs. Always use a latex condom with a water-based lubricant. Women as well as men should bring their own supply of condoms and store them in a dry place away from heat. Educate yourself on the customs, beliefs, and laws of your host country regarding sexual behavior. HIV continues to be a risk worldwide. Men and women, regardless of sexual orientation, need to be well informed.
10. **Other health questions you should consider:**
  - a. What general health issues should I consider in the country that I am visiting?
  - b. What medications should I consider taking?
  - c. What is the quality of the air/water/public facilities and how should I prepare for them?
  - d. What precautions are recommended for safe sexual practice?
  - e. What local customs, laws and religious beliefs regarding sexual behavior, alcohol consumption, and drug use should I know about before traveling?

- f. What are the laws regarding transport of medications, contraceptives and medical equipment should I know about?
- g. What type of medical insurance should I have?

As a further resource to health concerns, you should visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at their website: [www.cdc.gov/travel/](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/)

### **Safety and Legal Issues**

(Much of this section has been taken from Middlebury College's handbook: A Pre-Departure Handbook, Chapter 6 Safety and Legal Issues)

#### **Safety Abroad**

Safety is an understandable concern wherever you may be going, however, it is useful to take a comparative perspective. The United States is known around the world as a relatively dangerous country, and our street crime statistics support this view. No country has as many hand guns nor as many gun related deaths and injuries. U.S. rates of drug and alcohol abuse amongst the highest in the world. Even college campuses have their share of robbery, property destruction, drunkenness, violence, and sexual assault. Many international visitors to the United States are concerned about what they might find in the U.S. It is also important to consider that the U.S. media coverage of the rest of the world focuses (often sensationally) on overseas political upheavals, violent strife, and natural disasters. One of the first reactions study abroad students have is how "normal" life seems abroad, in spite of cultural differences. However, although you may be statistically safer abroad than at home, danger can occur anywhere, and *you play a big part in minimizing risks and hazards.*

The following are things you can do to help ensure that your study abroad experience is a safe one:

- Read and evaluate all materials provided by your program or university that relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in your host country.
- Pay attention to the local conditions. Stay informed about local and regional news, read newspapers with good international coverage and analysis of local issues.
- Keep a low profile and try not to identify yourself as an American by dress, behavior, or speech.
- Avoid protests or potentially violent situations or places where Americans are known to congregate. In the event of disturbances, do not get involved.
- Keep your street smarts. Remember that adjusting to city life is part of the cultural adjustment process, since most cities where students study abroad are much larger than Portland, Maine.
- Keep your residence locked and report any suspicious persons hanging around your building or campus.
- Register upon arrival with the U.S. consulate or embassy having jurisdiction over the area in which you are living.

- Make sure your resident director, host family, or foreign university official knows how to contact you in case of emergency. Leave your itinerary if you are traveling.
- Be wary of impairing your judgment through the excessive use of alcohol, and do not fall under the influence of drugs.
- Avoid walking alone at night.
- Do not display money, jewelry, cameras, or other valuable items.
- Familiarize yourself with your neighborhood, locate your nearest police station and hospital, and be sure you have any emergency phone numbers.
- Don't allow yourself to be vulnerable. Take the same precautions you would at home regarding giving out your name and address to unknown people.
- Unfortunately women travelers are more likely to encounter sexual harassment. Dangerous or uncomfortable situations can sometimes be avoided by dressing conservatively, not walking alone at night or in questionable neighborhoods, and not agreeing to meet anyone in a secluded place. In addition be aware that there are many unfortunate stereotypes about American women.

For more information on safety:

- State Department Travel Advisories, reports from the U.S. government, which monitors political conditions in every country of the world: <http://travel.state.gov>
- Culturgrams, produced by Brigham Young University for more than 160 areas of the world. Each report includes information on historical and political background, country specific customs, and more: [www.culturgram.com](http://www.culturgram.com).
- Association for Safe International Road Travel promotes road travel safety through education and advocacy. This organization compiles yearly updated road travel reports on over 60 countries (there is a charge for obtaining the reports): [www.asirt.org](http://www.asirt.org).
- Regarding road travel, be aware that driving customs vary a great deal, and in most countries pedestrians are not given the right-of-way. Find out which roads are safest and whether it is safe to travel on overnight trains and buses. You are advised not to drive at all while abroad, especially in countries where driving on the left-hand side of the road is the norm.

## Legal Issues

When you are abroad you are subject to the laws of the country in which you are living and studying. The laws are likely to be very different from those in the U.S. and in Maine. You should know that the American principle of "innocent until proven guilty" does not apply in all legal systems abroad, so the best advice for you is to know the laws and obey them. Please remember that if you should get yourself into trouble with the law in your host country, there is nothing USM can do for you, and there is little the U.S. Embassy or Consulate can do to help.

Some words of advice:

- The only assistance the U.S. Embassy or Consulate can provide for you is to give you a list of local attorneys and physicians, contact your next of kin in case of emergency, contact friends or relatives on your behalf to request funds or guidance, provide assistance during civil unrest or natural disaster, and replace a lost or stolen passport. They cannot get you out of jail.
- The experience of a foreign jail is not something with which you want to be familiar in your host country. In many cases the conditions are deplorable, and bail provisions as we know them in the U.S. are rare in many countries.
- You should avoid all involvement with illegal drugs. In most cases, drug laws are extremely severe (more so than in the U.S.), regardless of whether the drug is in possession for personal use or for sale, and in many cases regardless of the amount. (There have been cases of Americans arrested and jailed for long periods abroad for possessing as little as 1/10 ounce of marijuana.)

## **Health and Safety Checklist**

- I know what my insurance policy does and does not cover.
- I have received a complete physical from my doctor.
- I have received all necessary immunizations required/recommended for entry to the countries I will visit, and I know where to obtain other inoculations abroad, if needed.
- I am familiar with the health care system of the country where I will be studying, including the quality of facilities and the cost of services.
- I have any necessary medications/prescription drugs to take with me.
- I have extra eyeglasses/contact lenses/eye solution to take with me.
- I know who the emergency contacts are at USM and on-site, and I know how to reach them.
- I know where to get help if needed.
- I know what precautions to take when eating local food.
- I have researched where to buy food that suits my dietary needs/ restrictions (i.e. for vegetarians, diabetics, allergies, etc.).
- I understand that the use of alcohol and drugs greatly increases my risk of accident and injury.

## Cultural Matters

(This section is also drawn from Middlebury College's Pre-Departure Handbook)

Robert Kohls, a renowned author of intercultural literature, defines culture as "an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society . . . the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes its customs, language, material artifacts and shared systems of attitudes and feelings. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation." It is important to recognize your own "cultural baggage" when you go abroad.

### Personal Inventory

Study, travel or work abroad is a whole person experience. The parts of your identity that make you unique inevitably become part of your experience abroad. Time abroad often facilitates personal reflection and teaches people as much about themselves as it does about other people. Before you go, you will want to consider how your identity might affect, or be affected by, your experience abroad. See the list below and resources it directs you to.

#### *Gender*

Gender is a characteristic that can affect your experience abroad. Both women and men are often particularly aware of gender based treatment in a foreign culture that differs from their home culture. It's good to talk with someone who has spent time in your host country about these differences before you go. For women who have concerns about sexual harassment, safety, or social expectations, there are a number of books devoted to these issues such as *A Journey of One's Own: Uncommon Advice for the Independent Woman Traveler* (by Thalia Zepatos, 1996); *Travelers' Tales: Gutsy Women, Travel Tips, and Wisdom for the Road* (by Marybeth Bond, 1996); and *Safety and Security for Women Who Travel* (Travelers' Tales Guides by Sheila Swan and Peter Laufer, 1998).

#### *Race, Ethnicity, Minority or Majority Status*

Because of your race or ethnicity, you may be accorded different privileges or experiences different barriers abroad than those you experience at home. Different cultures define "race" and "ethnicity" differently, create different categories, and expect different things of people within these categories.

#### *Class*

Overseas you may experience class issues differently than you do at home. In certain contexts, working class Americans may be considered rich. In other contexts, upper middle class Americans may be considered poor. Certain cultures have more rigidly defined or more openly articulated ideas about class than those in the United States. Think about who you will be meeting as a student engaged in higher learning in your host country. Think about who you would like to meet during your semester or year abroad.

#### *Sexual Orientation*

Depending on your sexual orientation you may encounter different challenges abroad than at home. At the same time, while overseas, people often examine, or reexamine, questions of sexual

identity because of increased personal freedom or increased time for personal reflection. Since many ideas we have about sexual orientation and sexuality are culturally based, students need to be aware of how this will affect their relationships with host nationals, cultural adjustment and reentry, and the overall study abroad experience.

### *Religion*

People around the world have different ideas and expectations regarding religion. To be respectful of others, it is important to learn as much as possible about the religious beliefs, practices and norms of the area to which you are traveling. You may also want to research whether or not people of your faith meet and practice in the place you are going.

### *Disability*

Travel is always a challenge to a person's problem solving abilities. This is no different for a person with a disability. People with disabilities not only meet these challenges, but some people have written about their experiences, making it easier for the travelers who follow them. While overseas, people with disabilities will likely find some things inaccessible, but preparation and persistence can help. Mobility International USA (phone: 541-343-1284, [www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org)) is an excellent resource on travel for people with physical disabilities.

### *Learning Style*

You will probably find that the teaching styles and the learning expectations at higher education institutions in your host country are different from those at U.S. institutions. Classes in many other countries are often more formal, consisting almost entirely of lecture with little interaction between students and professors. Research the system of education in your host country before your departure. Be prepared to be an active participant in your learning. Talk with students who have studied abroad in your host country about these issues.

### *Dietary Concerns*

In the United States, we live in a society which offers a wide range of food choice. When traveling abroad, it is sometimes difficult to maintain a particular diet (for example, a vegetarian or medically restricted diet). Vegetarianism can mean a variety of things to different people. Think carefully about how your food choices might affect your friends who invite you to dinner, your home stay family, or students with whom you cook in the residence halls. Prepare yourself for societies in which ingredients are rarely listed on packaging.

### *Health*

Because an experience abroad can be physically, mentally and emotionally demanding, think carefully about your health. A certain amount of stress due to culture shock and a change in living conditions is a normal part of an experience abroad. In some cases, such stress may aggravate an illness you have under control at home. You may also have concerns about health care facilities and insurance. (Please see the Healthcare Issues section in this handbook for more detailed information.)

### *Smoking*

While there is currently a strong movement in the United States against smoking in public places, the situation in many other countries is quite different. While abroad, you may encounter more

secondhand smoke than you are used to, with smokers showing little concern about whether or not it bothers you (for example, in restaurants or on trains). For smokers, traveling abroad might be a long sought haven of smoking freedom.

### **Being an American Abroad**

Like previously mentioned identity issues, there are many stereotypes that exist and Americans are not excluded from this. Frequently, the stereotype of the American is not at all flattering, and can include characteristics such as:

- Arrogant patriotism (the "ugly American" who expects everyone to speak English and thinks that every country should pattern itself after the United States)
- Loud and overly friendly behavior
- Drunkenness
- Immature behavior
- Obsessed with being hard working
- Wealthy
- Ignorant of other countries
- Promiscuous
- Always in a hurry

It is up to you to behave in a way that will show the people in your host country that this is indeed an unjustified stereotype that cannot be applied arbitrarily, at least to you. It is important, however, to recognize your "Americanness" and to think about what cultural baggage you will be carrying abroad. To help you think about this, Kohls has developed a list of 13 commonly held American values. See if you recognize yourself in any of these values, and think about the fact that some cultures have values that are diametrically opposite to these American values.

#### *Personal Control Over the Environment*

Americans do not generally believe in the power of fate. Americans see this as superstitious and reflects an unwillingness to take initiative. Life's problems tend to be viewed as coming from one's laziness or unwillingness to take responsibility, rather than from bad luck.

#### *Change*

Americans tend to see change as good, leading to development, improvement, and progress. More traditional cultures see change as destructive. They value stability and tradition.

#### *Time*

Time is of utmost importance to Americans. Time is something to be on, kept, filled, saved, lost, wasted, and even killed. Americans tend to be more concerned with getting things done on time than they are with interpersonal relationships. Americans stop discussions abruptly in order to make appointments on time and to be productive.

#### *Equality and Fairness*

Equality is so valued in American culture that it is seen as having a religious basis. At least in theory, Americans believe that all people are created equal and that everyone should have equal

opportunities.

#### *Individualism and Interdependence*

Americans tend to view themselves as highly individualistic and resist being thought of as part of any homogenous group. Individualism leads to privacy, which most Americans highly value. It is interesting to note that the word for "privacy" does not even exist in many non-Western languages.

#### *Self-Help and Initiative*

Americans tend to take credit for accomplishments as individuals and tend to value the "self-made" man or woman.

#### *Competition*

Americans tend to believe that competition brings out the best in people, and "free enterprise" is valued in many areas of life.

#### *Future Orientation*

Americans tend to value the future, devalue the past, and to an extent, are unaware of the present. Many Americans work so hard and think so much about their future that a perfectly happy present often goes unnoticed.

#### *Action/Work Orientation*

Americans tend to see any action as superior to inaction. Americans tend to schedule an active life and to schedule in time for relaxation. Often the first question people ask each other when meeting is, "What do you do?" meaning what is their profession.

#### *Informality*

Americans are more informal than many other cultures. For example, many Americans call their bosses by their first names, dress is more casual even at formal events, and even greetings are casual (e.g., "Hi" rather than, "Hello, how are you?").

#### *Directness, Openness, and Honesty*

Americans tend to prefer the direct approach to delivering information, no matter how unpleasant. Americans tend to see honesty as most important, and anyone who uses an intermediary to deliver unpleasant information is seen as manipulative and untrustworthy.

#### *Practicality and Efficiency*

The reputation of Americans is practical and efficient. They tend to value rational and objective decisions over emotional and subjective ones, and the pragmatic approach is the overwhelming philosophy.

#### *Materialism and Acquisitiveness*

Foreigners tend to consider Americans to be very materialistic. Americans tend to give high priority to obtaining, maintaining, and protecting material objects, and value newness and innovation.



### *Handling Anti-Americanism*

There may be times when you feel as though you are being attacked personally for being an American. Sometimes you will be expected to answer questions about American foreign policy and to justify the actions of your government that you may or may not agree with. There is no right or wrong way to deal with anti-American slurs or suggestions, and you will certainly develop your own strategy for addressing these issues. However, some suggestions are not to reinforce the negative American stereotypes with your own behavior, and to try to understand the motives of the person criticizing you and your country. Ask more questions to try to understand why the person believes what s/he does. Most importantly, remain tolerant and avoid becoming defensive. Keep an open mind and use the experience to learn about yourself and about cultural differences.

### **Cross-Cultural Adjustment**

Because of the cultural differences you will encounter, as well as the cultural baggage that you will inevitably take with you abroad, you will certainly encounter some adjustment issues. This is nothing to fear, and indeed it is a normal and common part of the process. It should help you to know a little bit about what you may experience.

Upon arrival in the host country, many students go through an initial phase of euphoria and excitement, sometimes known as the "honeymoon phase." You will probably be very excited by the newness of your surroundings and things that appear unusual will be interesting. Sometimes students in this first stage have a false sense of security, so it is especially important to keep safety precautions in mind. After this initial period wears off, it is common to feel that your usual ways of dealing with things and your habits and routines do not work in your host country. There are endless subtle cultural differences, and the most minor tasks may seem major. For example, you may encounter difficulties with language, housing, money, transportation, food, recreation, and even health. You may begin to feel like an outsider, things may seem confusing and frustrating, and you may even start to feel a little depressed. This psychological disorientation is what is often referred to as "culture shock."

There is no right or wrong way to deal with culture shock, but the most important thing is to be aware that this is a very normal phenomenon, so recognizing and accepting its existence is an important first step. It is suggested that you avoid seeking out other disgruntled or unhappy people, and do not isolate yourself. Do not sit around criticizing the culture and being negative. This will just prolong your gloom. Keep busy, set goals for yourself, and try not to be judgmental. Be aware that the problems probably are not so much with your surroundings, but with you. In time, the negative symptoms of culture shock will disappear, and you will certainly adjust. Kohls states that, "Culture shock is in some degree inevitable and is the occupational hazard of overseas living through which one has to be willing to go in order to enjoy the pleasures of experiencing other countries and cultures in depth."

#### *How to Cope With Culture Shock:*

- Be aware that it does exist.
- Remember that the problem isn't with "them," but with you.
- Don't think that you are "strange" or "abnormal."

- While sometimes difficult, remember that culture shock can leave you with broader perspectives, deeper insights, and wider tolerance.
- Don't sit around being negative and critical go out and do something.
- Look for the best, not the worst.
- Before you go abroad, learn as much as you can about your host country.
- Keep an open mind.
- Practice laughing at yourself.

The USM Office of International Programs wishes  
you a Bon Voyage!



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