Pre-departure Orientation for Short-term Travel Programs

University of Southern Maine
Office of International Programs
101 Payson Smith Hall
Why go abroad?

• To learn more about yourself.

• To learn about another culture and country.

• To see yourself and your country from a different perspective.

• To challenge yourself to think in new ways.
Know yourself.

How many of you have traveled outside the U.S. before? Are there any first-timers?

Will this be your first time on a plane?

Why did you decide to go on this program?

What do you want to get out of this experience?
Know your country.

- Read a book that is set in that area before you leave.
- Go online and read the local or national newspapers.
- Read websites from the local tourist board and guidebooks.
- Read up on the history and culture of the country.
- Observe local behaviors before acting.
- Observe non-verbal cues.
Culture and Culture Shock

• “Culture can be most broadly defined as the shared sets of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors which are widely held by members of the host culture.” (www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/)

• Common reactions to being in a new culture:
  • The Honeymoon Stage: Everything is shiny and new!
  • The Stressful/Irritated Stage: A mild response to “stimulus overload.” You’re tired, withdrawn, annoyed, and irritated by small, common behaviors (public displays of affection, different hygiene, etc.). This is a result of a lot of small things cumulating into a deeper reaction.
  • Language Fatigue: This occurs if you’re operating in a different language. Living in a second language is exhausting!
  • Culture Balance: Finding a balance between your ways of living with the host culture way of life.
Before you leave

• Make a photocopy of your passport and keep it separate from your actual passport. Leave a photocopy of your credit cards with your family in case they are lost or stolen.

• Make sure that you’ve signed your passport.

• Leave a copy of your itinerary with your family.

For More Information on Passports: travel.state.gov
Packing

• Pack lightly!!! Only pack what you can carry by yourself at one time.

• Pack at least one extra change of clothes in your carry-on bag in case your luggage gets lost.

• Due to new airport regulations, any liquids or gels that you pack in your carry-on bag must be no more than 3 ounces each. All liquids must fit into (1) one quart ziplock bag. You cannot bring any drinks past the security clearance.

Bad Packing          Good Packing
Stay Healthy!

- Bring enough of your prescription medications to last the duration of the program and an extra half.
  - Pack them in your carry-on bag and leave them in their original, labeled bottles.
  - It’s a good idea to bring the generic prescription from your doctor.
  - Ask your doctor for advice on adjusting when you take your medication due to the time difference.

- Investigate your medical insurance coverage for overseas and decide if you would like to purchase additional coverage. We provide emergency medical evacuation and repatriation insurance to all participants.

- Stay hydrated. Drinks lots of fluids to stay healthy.

www.cdc.gov/travel/
Stay Healthy!

• If you are traveling to a country where the water supply makes travelers sick, be sure to only drink bottled water and brush your teeth with bottled water. Do not order ice with your drinks, and avoid salads, thin skinned fruits (such as grapes), milk and milk products, and seafood that is far from where it was originally caught.

• Get lots of rest. Each day will be very busy, so be sure to go to bed at a reasonable time each night.
  • Beat jet lag by setting your watch to local time and going to bed at the local time.
Stay Healthy!

- Your health should always be your number one concern. Be safe and do not engage in risky behaviors. Remember that STDs are global. Sexual contact should be avoided or a latex condom used correctly for every sexual contact.

- Going abroad can be very stressful and is NOT a cure for physical or emotional disorders. Being in a new environment, eating new foods, being on a different schedule, can all exasperate pre-existing conditions. Do NOT ignore any health concerns.

  Your health is more important than any travel program.
Money

- Consult a local guidebook for average costs of food and any other items that may not be included in your program.
- Have a variety of ways to access money
  - ATM card
  - Credit card
  - Traveler’s checks
- Investigate whether your bank or credit card company charges you for usage overseas.
- Bring a small amount of money in the local currency with you (~$50).
Safety

• Keep your valuables and passport in the hotel safe.

• Keep your money with you at all times. Do not carry a lot of money.

• Be aware of your surroundings when you withdraw money from an ATM.

• Never go anywhere alone. Always have someone from the group with you.

• Watch for traffic—cars, motorcycles, buses do not stop for pedestrians like they do here in Maine.

• Do not tell strangers your travel plans.

• Be street smart and use your common sense. Don’t do something that you wouldn’t do at home! It’s easy to take risks in a new environment. You’re not invincible! Bad things can happen anywhere.

• Be aware of pickpockets. They often work in groups or pairs.

• Do not display money, jewelry, cameras, or other valuable items.

• Avoid protests, potentially violent situations, or places where Americans are known to congregate. In the event of disturbances, do not get involved.

• Never leave luggage unattended or offer to watch a stranger’s luggage.
Safety

• Walk with purpose. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. When possible, only ask directions from authority figures.
• Know how to use a pay phone and keep spare change in your pocket.
• Know a few useful phrases in the local language to signal for help, the police, or a doctor.
• Carry a small card in your wallet with the name, address, and phone number of the hotel where you are staying.
• Only take taxis clearly identified with official markings.
USM Policies

- This is a USM course. You are required to abide by the University of Maine System Code of Conduct while on this program.
- Even if the drinking laws are different in the country you are visiting, you are not permitted to drink alcohol if you are not 21 years old. If you are 21 or older and choose to consume alcoholic beverages, consume them in moderation.
- Instructors reserve the right to require you to return home at your own expense if your behavior does not reflect well on USM and/or is disruptive to the group.
- You will be show up to all meetings on-time and act professionally and courteously with everyone that you are brought into contact with.
Local Laws

• You are under the jurisdiction of the country you are in, not the laws of the U.S. constitution.

• Make sure you read the Consular Information that was included in your acceptance e-mail. This includes information on local laws that are different from our own. (travel.state.gov—on right hand column, you’ll see “Country Specific Information”)

• More than 1/3 of U.S. citizens incarcerated abroad, are in jail because of drugs. Some countries do not distinguish between possession and trafficking. Bottom line-NO DRUGS!
Staying in Touch

• Call home when you arrive. Your parents will be worried until you call them.

• If you purchase a phone card before you leave, make sure it works internationally. Get the toll-free access number for that country BEFORE you leave.

• It’s okay to call home a few times to check in, but don’t spend all of your free time on the phone. Live in the moment and savor the experience.

Thailand, 2006
Returning home

• Be sure to include this experience on your resume under your education experience.
• Think about what you learned and talk about it during a job interview.
• Jot down any skills that you have gained that may transfer to your career.
• Think about going abroad for a semester.
• Take a course with an international focus to keep your experience alive.
• Be a mentor to an international student.
• Going abroad changes lives!
Have a Safe and Memorable Experience!!

Bon Voyage from the Office of International Programs!