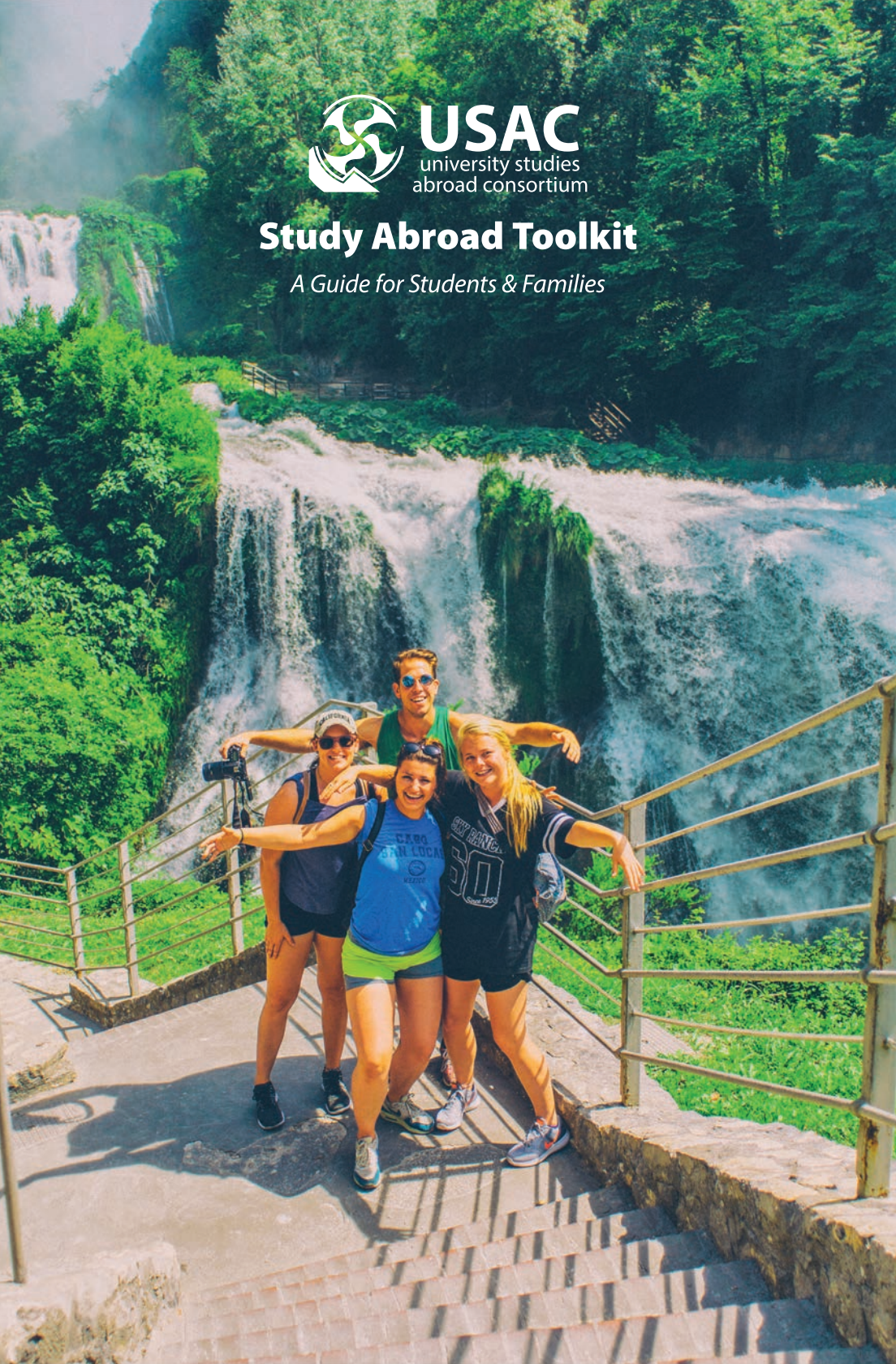




USAC
university studies
abroad consortium

Study Abroad Toolkit

A Guide for Students & Families





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Welcome from the USAC CEO & President

Congratulations!

You have made a great decision to study abroad! We know you are probably feeling a variety of emotions as you prepare to head to your program site—excited, nervous, curious, or not quite sure what to feel! Rest assured, that is all absolutely normal. We, and our staff abroad, look forward to welcoming you soon to your USAC program. Without a doubt, it will be an exciting and enriching experience. This is your moment to explore the world!

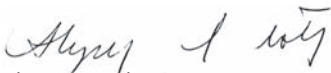
We know that you have many questions. We hope our website answers many and gives you an idea of who we are as an experienced, dedicated, non-profit organization. For over 36 years, we have worked with more than 50,000 students. We are strongly committed to creating high quality academic and cultural programs abroad and we are constantly working to improve and expand on what we offer. You will find opportunities in and outside of the classroom in your host culture, such as language learning, interaction with native students in the community and at your host university, volunteering, sports, and so much more. It is up to you to get involved and to take advantage of all that is offered through your USAC program and in your new home. The few regrets we hear from students after a program are: they did not practice the language enough, they did not participate in all the activities, they did not spend enough time exploring their program city, and they wish they had stayed longer!

So I encourage you to slow down and to think sincerely about what you want and hope to accomplish from your experience abroad. Maybe it's achieving a certain language level, completing multiple credits or an internship, making international friends, eating many flavors of gelato, seeing X number of UNESCO sites, learning to be more open to other cultures.... Whatever your goals and dreams are, keep them in mind as you take on this awesome adventure, share them with family and friends, look for ways to achieve them, and be open to adjusting those goals as you go. By going abroad, you are opening yourself up to a world of amazing opportunities and possibilities. Don't be afraid if you change your mind or have new opinions by the time to come home.

Personally, I loved the New England town I grew up in, but I often looked to the horizon line where the ocean met the sky, and wondered what possibilities were beyond that line. I was fortunate to have family, friends and teachers who encouraged and supported me to go find out—to explore the world, to study and live in different countries, and to discover new skills and ways of life that I could not even imagine at that time. Those experiences—academic and personal—have made me who I am today and have directly impacted my career and life in so many positive ways.

I wish that same kind of fulfilling experience for you! I am proud and excited that you have chosen USAC to guide you on this journey.

Safe travels,



Alyssa Nota, Ph.D.

CEO & President

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Preparing To Go

INFORMATION

USAC Student Gateway Account

USAC **Gateway** account login information is issued when you apply. Among its functions, **Gateway** allows you to:

- Monitor your application status
- See documents you need to submit
- Locate important information about your program
- Pay your fees

You can choose to give your login information to your parents so that they have access to the same information. You are expected to take responsibility for your study abroad preparation, learning, and behavior while abroad. Carefully read and review all the pre-departure materials.

Meet with Academic and Study Abroad Advisors

Schedule a meeting with your academic advisor at your home university to discuss your plans to study abroad. Ask for advice on which locations and which courses may be best suited for you and your academic goals. Your home university can also advise you on how to incorporate a study abroad program into your graduation plans.



It's very hard to write in a way that helps readers really understand an experience as amazing as studying abroad! There really isn't a way to portray exactly how spectacular and life-changing being there is."

- McKenna Keller, USAC Torino Alumna, University of Denver

Complete Home University Requirements

Your home university may have requirements and documents in addition to what you receive from USAC. Make sure to inform your home university of your intention to study abroad, including financial aid, scholarships, academic advisor, disability services, and the study abroad or international programs office to ensure you have completed all requirements.

Recommended Reading

Gain insight about the places you will visit during your time abroad by reading information about your program city and country online and in travel books. Learn as much as possible before you depart to prepare for and facilitate your adjustment. Useful program-specific information and articles will also be emailed to you by your Program Advisor.

Our recommended reading includes:

- Behave Yourself! (Michael Powell)
- The Art of Crossing Cultures (Craig Storti)
- A Student Guide to Study Abroad (Berdan, Goodman, and Taylor)
- Travelers' Health — How to Stay Healthy Abroad (Richard Dawood, MD)
- The Study Abroad Journal (Natalie Garret and Brooke Roberts)

On-Site Orientation

Upon arrival at your program site, you will participate in a comprehensive, mandatory on-site orientation. These orientations provide a general introduction to the country, city, and program, as well as important health and safety information and general travel advice. This on-site information builds upon the pre-departure resources you receive, including this Toolkit, which is sent to all students and parents/guardians before the program start date. We believe this orientation is so important to your success that students who fail to attend the entire orientation will be charged a \$200 fee by USAC. In some instances, the on-site staff may provide a make-up orientation, but it will not replace the original orientation and will not negate the \$200 fee.



Programs Overview

USAC offers two different program models. For both types of programs, the USAC Central Office provides US-based support, such as pre-departure suggestions, housing contacts, immigration and visa guidance, travel tips, assistance with the course selection process, group flights, and specific arrival information. Key differences between the two program models include pricing, type of academic record awarded, level of on-site support, and the degree of student independence required.

Specialty Programs

- Provide individualized support and attention prior to departure and throughout the term.
- Each program site has a permanent, full-time Resident Director, as well as staff and faculty to assist you with your needs.
- The USAC staff arranges housing, plans field trips/tours, seeks out internship placements, volunteer and service learning opportunities in the local community, and is available for travel suggestions, advising and other needs while abroad.
- Courses offered are vetted and approved by a USAC Affiliate University and reported on the USAC Grade Report. Your campus may accept the USAC Grade Report directly or a transfer transcript.

Partnership Programs

- Direct-enrollment agreements in which USAC functions as the intermediary between you and our partner university abroad.
- Upon arrival at the program site, many student services will be offered directly by the on-campus International Programs Office of the host university rather than a USAC Resident Director, such as orientation, student activities, and assistance with course registration.
- You will need to assume much more individual responsibility than you are perhaps used to at your home university, including, but not limited to, course guidance and health services.
- The level of student services is also different in other countries and will vary significantly from what you are used to. You should be prepared to take the initiative to deal with issues that you may encounter. While the staff onsite can help facilitate support, you will be responsible for resolving problems should they arise.
- You register as a student of the host university and will receive an official transcript issued directly from the foreign university for use in transferring credit back to your home university at the conclusion of your term(s) abroad.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Power of Attorney

You should consider granting Power of Attorney to someone you trust to take care of official or legal business in your absence. A Power of Attorney form is a legal document that gives the person of your choice the legal power to act on your behalf. This will be useful to you while you are abroad and are not able to personally deal with your bank, your home university, or other government or private offices.

You can find a Power of Attorney form at office supply stores or online. It must be completed and notarized to be legally binding. You might consider leaving a copy with your home university's admissions, records, or financial aid departments. Some institutions require that you use their forms, so you should find out what you will need well in advance of your departure.

Voting

Because you will be living outside of your home country, you will need to apply to vote by absentee ballot. Contact your local government about this process well before your departure.

- US Federal Voting Assistance Program: fvap.gov
- Youth Vote Overseas: usvotefoundation.org

DOCUMENTATION

Keep track of the following important documents at all times.

Passports

You must have a passport in order to travel internationally. Getting a passport is one of the first steps you should take once you have decided to study abroad. Refer to the *Passport Copy Requirements* document in your **Gateway** account for more details.

Visas

You will get a site-specific *Visa Guide* in your **Gateway** account approximately four months before your program starts. A visa is official permission to stay in a foreign country for an extended amount of time. Visas are granted by the government of the country in which you are studying and are sometimes referred to as a residence permit.

Some countries and consulates may require an in-person visit to apply for your visa, which may require you to travel to the consulate. Some visa application processes require you to surrender your original passport to the consulate/embassy where it will remain until your visa is issued. The processing time for visas may be lengthy, and if it isn't started in a timely manner, it could affect your ability to leave by your departure date. You are responsible for any fees associated with getting your visa (including, but not limited to, travel to the embassy or consulate).

Visas for Non-US Citizens

Check with the consulate or embassy of the country you'll be traveling to regarding visa requirements.



Health and Safety

Student health and safety is our top priority. Each program offers an extensive on-site orientation, during which you will receive program-specific health and safety information.

If you experience any problems involving your health and/or safety while participating in your program, remember that the on-site staff is there to help. Go to them and explain the problem. They should be able to assist you with most issues, and for issues beyond their abilities, they can refer you to someone who can help.

PRE-DEPARTURE PREPARATION

Medical Check-Up

Get a regular check-up with your doctor well before you depart to take care of any routine care before you leave. Discuss existing medical/mental conditions you have and how you can prepare for your term abroad. Medical resources may differ from what you are accustomed to or may not even be available. Ask your doctor for health advice specific to the region where you will be traveling. You should visit the dentist for a cleaning and examination and the eye doctor (if applicable) as well.

Medication

It is not possible to receive vitamins or medicine by mail while abroad. If you are taking any vitamins or prescription medications (including glasses or contacts), you should bring enough to last for your entire stay and always pack them in the original container in your carry-on luggage. Carry prescription drugs with a label showing your name, the instructions for use, and the name and dosage of the medication. Unless advised by your doctor, do not change your medication or your dosage immediately before, during, or after your time abroad. Information on contraception may be more difficult to get overseas. If you anticipate needing birth control while abroad, you should consider taking it with you.

Ask for copies of your prescription(s) in case you need refills abroad. Ask your doctor to write the generic name, list the active and inactive ingredients, and the purpose of any essential drug you may be taking. The name of the drug may be different in a foreign country, but having the generic name for the active and inactive ingredients will help you find the equivalent medicine, if needed. The FDA also maintains a database of drug names searchable by brand name, generic name, and active ingredient. Some prescriptions may need to be translated if you wish to fill them while abroad.

Check with your health insurance provider or the embassy of the country in which you will be studying or visiting to see what the laws are for importing your prescription medication. Research your prescriptions and the laws of your program country. There may be restrictions on the amount you can enter the country with and/or your medication may not be legal in your host country. If one of your prescribed medications is illegal in the country in which you will be studying, contact your doctor or health insurance provider for suggestions. USAC is not able to give you specific answers as to which medications will or will not be allowed into other countries. Start this research as soon as possible. FDA Pharmaceutical Database: www.fda.gov/drugs/default.htm

Vaccinations

Before departure, get the appropriate vaccinations and preventive prescriptions for your destination as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and/or your physician. Some countries require or recommend vaccinations or other special medications prior to your arrival. These may need to be spread out in a series over several months, so look into this as early as possible.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov/travel
- World Health Organization: who.int/ith/en

Mental and Physical Health

The stress of travel and of adjusting to unfamiliar situations can amplify existing conditions and even trigger a recurrence of a condition from the past. Keep this possibility in mind as you plan for ways to handle both physical and mental/emotional health issues while abroad. Be ready with a list of what you might need, whom you might need to help you, and the ways in which you will get that help if an issue arises. Some campus support services are not available on all campuses abroad (e.g. counseling, disability accommodations, etc.). Communicate with USAC if you are struggling so we can assist you in speaking with a professional. Make all your necessary health information available to USAC as soon as possible, so we can assist you with any special needs or advise you on the challenges you might face while abroad.

Not all accommodations are available abroad. Once we receive your accommodation request, we will contact the staff abroad to determine if your accommodations can be met. Disability accommodation requests must be received by the USAC Enrollment Department at enrollment@usac.edu no later than 60 days prior to departure to allow adequate time to document and process your request.

Maintaining your Mental Health while Abroad



Talk to your therapist about your plans to study abroad, if applicable.

Start thinking ahead about your coping strategies and make a list of what you'll use to de-stress.



Notice the hobbies and activities that help you cope with stress, anxiety, and/or depression at home. Talk to USAC about pursuing those activities in your adopted country.

Disclose your mental health history to USAC so we can help you prepare by connecting you to insurance to set up continuing appointments abroad; providing you with applicable accommodations, if possible; and more.

Upon Arrival



Maintain a healthy routine of diet, sleep, and exercise.



Talk to USAC. If you're noticing significant changes in your mood, the on-site staff can help you access the resources you need.



Participate in group activities. Participation has been proven to help with cultural adjustment and overall levels of anxiety and depression.



Keep up the hobbies/coping strategies you set up before you left.



Remember that culture shock happens to everyone, but it can also trigger or reveal deeper issues, such as anxiety, depression, and panic disorder. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you notice signs of mood changes beyond what you expected to experience during culture shock.

After Your Return

Acknowledge the skills you acquired abroad – flexibility, problem solving, confidence, and more!



Exercise is an important coping tool. Not only will it help you combat homesickness, but it will also keep you healthy and in shape—both of which are important while abroad."

- Ryan Sullivan, USAC Torino Alumni, University of Nevada, Reno



HEALTH ABROAD

Fitness and Exercise

A healthy body can help with the adjustment to a new time zone and jet lag. Getting involved in sports is a great way to exercise and meet locals.

Food and Water

Give your body time to adjust to the new types of foods you will be eating. Find out if water is safe to drink where you will be living and traveling. Purify unsafe water before you drink it. Make sure any water bottles you buy come sealed. Remember that ice and the water you use to brush your teeth can be unsafe, as well as any produce rinsed in unsafe water.

Heat-Related Illness

Avoid exposure to extreme heat; symptoms of heat-related illness include chills, headaches, high body temperature, slurred speech, and more.

Dietary Needs and Preferences

The cultural norms and customs of some countries may not match your dietary needs and preferences. Research the culture and customs in the country in which you will be living to find more specific information. Many guidebooks include a small section on restaurants and shopping tips for vegetarians, vegans, or those with special dietary needs.

If you have a serious health-related dietary restriction, such as an allergy, you should learn how to communicate it in the language of your host country and/or carry a written version with you to present to waiters to avoid confusion.

- Dietary Card: dietarycard.com
- Gluten Free Card: glutenfreepassport.com/allergy-gluten-free-travel/gf-translation-cards/
- Vegan/Vegetarian Restaurants: happycow.net

SAFE AND LEGAL BEHAVIOR

A sudden change in environment — such as departing to live abroad — can often cause a wide range of unexpected behavioral reactions. These reactions may lead some to engage in atypical or risky behavior. Be aware of USAC rules and regulations, those of the host university, and the local laws and customs of the countries you will be visiting. You are expected to adhere to the legal system of the country you will be visiting, as well as abide by the USAC Code of Conduct, your home university's conduct code, and that of the host university.

General Safety Tips

- Carry contact information for on-site staff and local emergency services at all times.
- Always walk with someone you know whenever possible, especially at night.
- Stay in well-lit areas.
- If you feel uncomfortable in a situation, walk away.
- If you experience a troubling situation, report the incident to the on-site staff as soon as possible.



Keep an open mind! Everything between school, your family, your friends, will all be out of your comfort zone. But remember we are all going through the same thing."

- Caroline Ledeboer, USAC Puntarenas Alumna, California State University, Chico

Substance Abuse

The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad increases the risk of accident, injury, and victimization. In many countries, being found guilty of violating alcohol or drug laws can result in serious consequences, including jail.

Illegal Drugs

The use or possession of illegal drugs or paraphernalia can result in fines, imprisonment, expulsion, deportation, exile from that country, and/or other serious consequences. Drug use abroad violates USAC's Code of Conduct and possibly your home university's code of conduct, resulting in disciplinary action. In addition, it can put you in potentially dangerous situations. Visit the US Department of State's website for more information.



Alcohol

Many countries have different attitudes about drinking and the legal drinking age. You must remember you are not in your normal environment. While it may be common abroad to find alcohol served with meals and when socializing, being drunk is never socially acceptable. Drunk driving, in addition to the obvious dangers, carries heavy penalties abroad. Alcohol is involved in the vast majority of student incidents and is therefore discouraged. If you choose to drink, USAC strongly recommends drinking responsibly. Drinking and parties in student housing, as well as arriving home intoxicated, are prohibited and can be interpreted as rude or inappropriate behavior by your hosts. Landlords have the right to evict students for noise or behavioral problems.

Smoking

Smoking is prohibited in USAC student housing and facilities, and is strongly discouraged during your program. Despite the social acceptance of smoking in some foreign countries, smoking is detrimental to your health. Public smoking regulations may be different than in your home country. If you do decide to smoke while participating in a USAC program, it is your responsibility to know local laws and practices. You will also be expected to respect your roommates, host family, classmates, and others around you.

Safety Abroad

Maintaining safety abroad is much like at home: Use common sense, travel in groups, be aware of your surroundings, and be alert to your environment. You must take responsibility for your own safety. Be informed and make smart choices. Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws in the areas to which you plan to travel. Research how people from your country, race, ethnic group, religion, gender, and sexual orientation are viewed or treated. Always be aware of your surroundings, and do not behave in a way that detracts from that awareness (alcohol consumption, extensive attention to your cell phone or other electronic devices, wearing headphones, etc.).



Keep the on-site staff and an emergency contact at home well-informed of your whereabouts and activities, especially when traveling. Provide your contact at home your travel itinerary and copies of your important travel documents (passport, visa, plane tickets, and prescriptions). Review your **Gateway** account to ensure your contact information is updated prior to departure.

More information on health and safety will be discussed in greater detail during your on-site orientation. If you feel you need further information or have questions or concerns, contact your Program Advisor or the on-site staff.

Protests and Demonstrations

While it is important to understand the political and social climate of your host country, we strongly caution against joining in or going near protests and demonstrations. Not only do these events pose a threat to your personal safety, there may also be legal consequences for your participation.

Protecting Your Personal Belongings

The decision to take your personal belongings is yours. Similar to your living accommodations at your home university, it is your responsibility to insure your personal property while abroad, traveling, and in your USAC-arranged housing. Your valuables, such as electronic devices, may be covered already under your renter's/homeowner's insurance policies or through your credit card provider. If they are not, check with your personal insurance providers (e.g. auto insurance) to see about policies they might offer. USAC strongly recommends you purchase additional personal property and/or liability coverage, but it is not available through CISI.

Nightlife

Going out and experiencing your host city nightlife is part of the living abroad experience. However, the same rules for behavior in your home country should govern your activities abroad. Behave in a mature and responsible manner; never do anything that puts you or others at risk, or makes you uncomfortable; research which types of transportation will be running late at night, always make a plan for getting home safely, and travel in pairs whenever possible.

Travel Safety Tips



Keep luggage close to you at the airport or train station. The more bags you carry, the easier it is to lose your stuff.



Sleep with valuables under your pillow on trains, long bus rides, or hostels.



Use safety pins to attach the pull tabs of your zipper to your bag. That way, no one can sneakily open it when you are in a crowded place.



Wear a backpack under your arm rather than on your back. Choose a purse with a zipper, worn across the chest.



Keep your wallet, camera, or other valuables at the bottom of your backpack.



Place the strap of your purse or backpack under the leg of your chair, still in sight. Never leave a bag hanging on the back of your chair!



Keep valuables on your person and close to you at all times, preferably on the front of your body.



If you keep valuables in your pocket, make sure it is a tight-fitting pocket that buttons or zips.



Don't carry large sums of cash!



! Beware !



Crowded Areas Pose a Higher Risk of Pickpocketing

Like train stations, restaurants, tourist attractions, metros, and at the beach.



Practice Good Habits

Keep items like your cell phone, purse, wallet, and camera in a safe and secure place at all times.



Water

Be aware of the potential dangers of swimming in bodies of water, and pay attention to information about where and when to swim. Ocean currents and aquatic life may be hazardous, warnings or sign postings may be different from what you are used to, or there may not be any warnings at all.

Fire

Fire precautions may not be the same abroad as in your home country. Familiarize yourself with fire equipment and escape procedures in your housing, on campus, and while traveling. For more tips, go to [firesafetyfoundation.org](https://www.firesafetyfoundation.org).

Hiking

Practice safe hiking tips: have a phone and map; stay on established trails; bring water (especially if it's hot out as you can experience dehydration quickly); know your start and end points; and if using public transportation to/from the trail head, know the transportation schedule so as not to return too late; tell someone (USAC staff, host family, etc.) where you're going and when you expect to return.



I gained personal growth and independence. I also gained a greater sense of the world and cultures."

- Emily St Pierre, USAC Viterbo Alumna, California State University, Chico



Sexual Harassment

Be aware of your surroundings while traveling. Actions that might be considered inappropriate in your home culture may be acceptable in your host country or vice versa. The best defense is to recognize situations that make you uncomfortable and avoid them. Trust your intuition. If you feel self-conscious or anxious in a situation, remove yourself immediately.

It is USAC policy that the sexual harassment of students and employees is unacceptable and prohibited. USAC students and employees will be held accountable for their actions. However, host university students or employees, host families, and local roommates are not USAC employees. If you encounter a problem, consult on-site staff immediately.

LGBTQ+

Laws and social norms for gender and sexual orientation vary between countries, and foreign governments may or may not provide the same protection of civil liberties that are standard in your home country. Carefully research your host country before departure, so that you can decide for yourself how open you can be regarding your sexuality and gender identity at your program site or while traveling. Learn relevant laws and social norms and be aware of local customs and attitudes towards sexuality and gender identity.

Helpful resources with country-specific facts include:

- outrightinternational.org
- rainbowsig.org/us-students-abroad/ilga-europe.org
- utopia-asia.com
- globalgayz.com
- travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/lgbt.html

What impact might your ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or dietary restrictions have on your experience abroad?



Contact your Program Advisor about any concerns you may have about how aspects of your identity may be received in your host country. You can also speak with your home university study abroad office. They can recommend specific resources or refer you to study abroad alumni who share similar identities and are willing to talk to you about their experience. Check with any other offices on your home campus that offer support for diverse students, such as a Multicultural Affairs Office or LGBTQ+ group.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Your safety and well-being while studying abroad is very important. It is in everyone's interest to prepare for most foreseeable occurrences. To that end, USAC has developed extensive crisis management and emergency response procedures to address different types of incidents. These procedures are updated on a regular basis.

General emergency procedure information is covered below, as well as during the mandatory on-site orientation.

USAC monitors the US Department of State Travel Advisories and Warnings, bulletins from the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), and other appropriate websites on a daily basis for any world events that may affect program sites and/or participants. Each Specialty Program site is registered at the appropriate US Embassy and Consulate, ensuring that the Resident Director is aware of current conditions and can be contacted if necessary.

If an emergency occurs, remain calm. If possible, stay with other USAC students, your host family, on-site staff, or host university representatives. It is important that you contact your Program Advisor and Resident Director (if applicable) to check in as soon as possible. However, it is more important that you remain in a safe environment. Carry emergency contact information with you at all times while you are abroad.

You can contact the USAC office at 1-866-404-8722 or 775-784-6569. The office is open from 8 am to 5 pm PST, Monday through Friday. After normal business hours, an emergency contact number is listed in the voicemail recording. Due to time differences between your location and the USAC Central Office, it may be several hours before someone is able to respond to you. We make every attempt to respond as quickly as possible.

If you are unable to contact the USAC office personally, try to have someone contact them for you or attempt to contact the closest consulate or embassy of your home country for further



instructions. The US Department of State's website contains information about emergency preparedness and procedures, as well as overseas embassy and consulate contact information. Local radio and television stations may also broadcast emergency information and instructions.

- US Department of State: travel.state.gov
- Overseas Security Advisory Council: osac.gov

When contacting USAC staff or the emergency contact numbers, be prepared to provide:

- Your full name
- The nature of the emergency
- A number where you can be contacted
- How long you will remain at that location (city and country information)

Students are advised to maintain regular contact with their parents, guardians, or other emergency contacts and to get in touch with them as soon as possible after an emergency.

On-Site Emergency Plan

It is impossible to know which, if any, emergency situation a USAC student may face while abroad. As a result, it is impossible to develop one single course of action that would be appropriate in every circumstance. In the event of an emergency, USAC will form a Crisis Management Team who will discuss any and all necessary actions to be taken at affected program sites.

For large-scale emergencies impacting an entire program location, USAC staff will communicate with each student's primary/secondary contacts and home university and post updates on the USAC website.





INSURANCE

Refer to the *Insurance Information document* in your **Gateway** account for more specifics about your policy and using your health insurance abroad.

All students are required to have health insurance while abroad on a USAC program, and, unless otherwise noted in their USAC Program Agreement, they are covered by USAC-purchased insurance (the cost of which is included in the program fees). Health insurance is not optional and cannot be deducted from your program fees.

CISI has a service called Assist America (AAI) which can help you to locate medical resources in the local area where you are studying abroad. They may also have advice on how to enter the country with medications. You can call AAI directly at 800-872-1414, you can also email medservices@assistamerica.com. Your ID number is 01-AA-CIS-01133.

Once abroad, it is common for doctors to require that you pay for your visit in cash up front. Save all receipts and submit a claim form after receiving services. You can find claim forms in the *Insurance Information document* in your **Gateway** account. Submit forms with your receipts to CISI insurance in order to seek reimbursement.

If you think something may come up that will preclude you from completing your USAC program, or if you just want the peace of mind for the unexpected, consider purchasing Trip Protection through InsureMyTrip. They offer coverage options in the event of loss from unforeseen sickness or injury, family emergency, weather, etc. that causes trip cancellation, and more depending on your selection: insuremytrip.com.



USAC staff and teachers are amazing and go out of their way to help the students. Thank you! "

- Jake Beechler, USAC San Sebastián Alumnus, University of Nevada, Reno



MONEY MATTERS

Good planning can make your study abroad plans an affordable reality. Your travel plans and lifestyle will largely determine the amount of money you will need during your stay. It is also a good idea to have extra funds available to use in case of emergency.

As a non-profit, university-based organization, USAC understands the financial pressures students (and parents) face to finance their education, and we are committed to maintaining modest fees for our programs. Additionally, we provide scholarships and access to information about other means of financing in order to provide an affordable study abroad opportunity.

Financial Aid

You must apply for financial aid to receive it, and the process is almost always time-sensitive. USAC accepts all types of financial aid and scholarships, but check with your home university or funding provider to determine if they will allow you to use it for study abroad. It is your responsibility to follow all instructions from your home university's financial aid advisor and complete all paperwork well before your departure. It is important that you take the initiative to communicate with both your university's financial aid and study abroad/international programs offices. Be sure to ask if your financial aid will need to be processed through an alternate university.

If you receive financial aid/scholarships, and want to defer your USAC balance, you must submit your Financial Aid Deferment form to USAC prior to the balance due deadline. The balance due to USAC may be deferred up to the amount of your anticipated financial aid/scholarships, until

the date those are dispersed. Refer to the *Program Fees & Options form* in your **Gateway** account for more information.

If your home university is a USAC Affiliate University, you can contact a representative at your school for more detailed financial aid procedures. A list of USAC Affiliate Universities and contacts is available on the USAC website.

Scholarships and Discounts

USAC awarded more than \$2 million in scholarships and discounts last year. We have a variety of scholarships available for students, and we encourage you to research additional sources of financial aid and scholarships. Visit the USAC website, refer to the *Scholarship Opportunities document* in your **Gateway** account, or contact the USAC Scholarship Team for details. Make sure to visit your home university's study abroad/international programs office and financial aid office for scholarship and funding opportunities as well. Contact the USAC Accounting Department for more information about discounts.

- USAC Website for Financial Aid and Scholarships: usac.edu/money-matters
- USAC Scholarship Team: scholarships@usac.edu

Making Payments to USAC

You may pay online through your **Gateway** account or over the phone with your debit card, Visa, MasterCard or Discover card. To use an American Express card, you can only pay over the phone. If you would like to pay by mail with a check or money order, make it payable to "USAC," indicate your name and program site, and mail it to the following address:

University Studies Abroad Consortium

P.O. Box 843706

Los Angeles, CA 90084-3706

If you are a student paying through your home university and not directly to USAC, consult your home university about your payment schedule.

If you are a non-US student, contact the USAC Accounting Department for payment deadlines.



One of the big reasons I chose the [USAC] Verona program is the cost. It's so affordable compared to any other programs I looked at."

- Edrienne Wood, USAC Verona Alumna, Texas A&M University

MONEY TIPS

- Don't carry extra credit cards or more money than you need.
- Leave a photocopy of the front and back of credit cards at home (make sure to hide the last 3 digits).
- Write down the contact numbers for your bank, debit, and credit card companies prior to departure. Keep these numbers in a safe place — separate from your wallet or purse — in the event that your wallet or purse is lost or stolen.
- Set up online banking or automated payments prior to departure, enabling you to check your account balance and pay bills while abroad.
- Keep emergency money separate from your wallet or purse.
- Be conscious of your surroundings while handling currency in public, especially when using an ATM.
- See if your bank has global partnerships or alliances to minimize bank fees.

Budgeting

Set up a plan for budgeting and funding your time abroad.

Before leaving, you should also make sure you stop automatic payments on items, services, or facilities you won't be using while you are abroad (e.g. gym membership, car insurance, utilities).

Look at the budget sheet posted in your **Gateway** account or the USAC website. This interactive spreadsheet provides program and other fees along with estimated expenses for living abroad. You can customize some of the expenses, and it is a good place to start planning your budget. You can also contact your Program Advisor to get a list of your program's past participants to ask about typical expenses they incurred while abroad.

As part of your preparation for studying abroad, make a list of the expenses you know you will have. Consider airfare, housing, transportation costs (both daily public transportation costs and additional trips), tuition, and textbooks. Then add extra expenses such as travel, dining out, entertainment and social activities, food, gifts, and souvenirs. Set aside extra funds for emergencies. You may also want to include the costs of items you plan to buy before you go. When you first arrive, you may find that you need something that you did not bring, but may not know where to go to get the best deals. You should expect to spend more money during that initial adjustment period than you will for the remainder of your stay.

- Cost of Living Calculators: expatistan.com, numbeo.com

To cut down on costs, grocery stores may be the best way to purchase an affordable meal. Look in local newspapers or magazines for ways to save money on activities (some may be free). Learn the local transportation system — the bus or metro system in a city is much less expensive than a taxi.

- Currency Converters: oanda.com, xe.com



Cash

It is helpful to have approximately \$200 (in small bills) in local currency upon arrival, especially if you arrive on a holiday, outside of normal working hours, or the ATM is broken. This can be obtained before departure in most international airports or major banks. It is not recommended to carry large amounts of cash. Many restaurants and local establishments may only take cash, and may not separate checks for large parties.

Debit Cards

ATMs and debit cards often have the best exchange rate for withdrawing money from your home bank account in the local currency. They also offer 24-hour accessibility. Check with your bank at home to make sure your card is approved for use abroad and to determine any charges related to using it internationally, as there are usually currency conversion fees for each withdrawal. Be aware of the daily withdrawal limit for your debit card. In some countries, ATMs will not accept a PIN longer than four digits or that starts with zero. This can be an issue with older ATMs, so contact your bank beforehand to resolve any possible conflicts and to possibly change your PIN number.

Check to see if your bank partners with other financial institutions abroad to minimize your fees, and ask if they have any programs for customers (especially students) traveling abroad to save money on foreign transactions. Let your bank know the dates and locations of your travels abroad — they may cancel your card if they see unexpected charges in foreign countries! Because transaction fees can add up, we recommend minimizing the number of transactions — a suggestion that requires a little bit of planning.



Credit Cards

Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted abroad. You should let your credit card company know when and where you will be traveling, and confirm that your card can be used abroad. Consider requesting a 4-digit PIN to use (like you would with a debit card), verify your daily limit, and check if there are any service fees/restrictions. You may, for example, be charged a fee or percentage for the currency exchange rate. Just in case, be prepared to have another form of payment in the event you cannot use your credit card.

Traveler's Checks

Do not take traveler's checks, as they are not typically accepted abroad.

Wiring Money Abroad

Western Union (and many financial institutions) can quickly wire money to most countries. You should expect to pay fees to send and/or receive funds by wire transfer; these can range from \$50 to \$100. To collect wired funds, you will need to show your passport or ID and the transaction record number that the sender was given when transferring the funds.

You can receive wired money directly into your bank account if you know the information that is required. Under certain conditions, your money could be delayed or some services might be unavailable. These conditions include the amount you are sending, the country you are sending to and any regulatory issues in that country, a change in identification requirements, time zone differences, or selection of delayed options. Always have a backup plan in case this happens.



LIVING AND TRAVELING ABROAD

Electricity and Compatibility

Outlets and sockets are different around the world, and electrical voltage varies from country to country. Many appliances brought from home will have a different plug shape or will end up shorting out.

Before you leave, determine the plug shape and voltage of the country in which you will be studying. You should consider purchasing a voltage converter/plug adapter kit if you are planning on traveling in many different countries. You can find these kits in travel stores, as well as online.

- Voltages: voltageconverters.com/voltageguide.htm

Appliances

If you are staying for a semester or longer, it may be beneficial to buy appliances abroad rather than bringing them with you. Past participants suggest keeping appliances to a minimum when packing. Purchasing hair dryers and curling/flat irons abroad can save room in suitcases and ensure home appliances are not destroyed by a different voltage. If you do bring appliances from home, you may need an adapter and/or converter.

Youth Hostels

If you plan to do any traveling away from your program site while you are studying abroad, you might consider staying in hostels, a less-expensive alternative to hotels. Many hostels are designed specifically for young, university-aged travelers on a budget. You may share a double room with one person, or a dorm-style room with two to 12 other people. Some hostels offer lockers or a secure room for temporary luggage storage. Consider purchasing a combination lock for your suitcase or backpack as well as personal property insurance.

Driving Abroad

USAC strongly discourages students from renting or operating a motor vehicle abroad, as it is extremely hazardous. If you choose to drive abroad, you may be required to get a special international driving permit and auto insurance. You are subject to all driving laws of that country. You may not be familiar with these rules, and some may be culturally-based or not explicitly written. Many times there are fewer laws, more relaxed driving requirements, and cheap but unregulated options to buy or rent motorcycles. USAC is not responsible for any injury, accident, or fine.

Flight Arrangements

It is your responsibility to book and pay for a flight to your program site since airfare is not included in the program fees. For many programs, USAC works with a travel agency to organize optional group flights. USAC staff will greet students on these flights when they arrive at the program site (Specialty Programs only). For your convenience, connecting flights can typically be added. Information about how to access the optional group flight will be provided in the Flight Guide on your **Gateway** account. *The Flight Guide* includes details about arrival airports, group flight benefits (if applicable), and end-of-program transportation.

If you choose not to book the optional group flight or if a group flight is not offered for your program site, you must book your flight independently. You are responsible for your own transportation to the program site. When making your travel plans, make sure you arrive in time for your program orientation and depart after the final examinations — you are required to be at the program site for both.

- Frosch Student Travel: froschstudenttravel.com/usac
- STA Travel: statravel.com

Flying Tips: 7 Ways to Avoid Airport Frustration

1. Make sure you buy your ticket under the exact name that appears on your ID.
2. Check the most recent airport security procedures and luggage restrictions, including weight limitations.
3. Know TSA and the airline's carry-on baggage restrictions.
4. Confirm your flight reservation 72 hours in advance for international travel.
5. Check in at the airport three hours prior to departure for international flights.
6. Research security measures: tsa.gov
7. Jetlag advice: ricksteves.com/plan/tips/jetlag.htm



Don't even think twice about it; just do it. You won't regret it. It's worth every second.

- Cristina Catania, USAC Torino Alumna, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Travel within Host City and Campus

You are responsible for local transportation. This may mean you will be relying on public transportation, the cost of which is not included in your program fees. In many cases, a pre-paid monthly pass or punch card (for the bus or metro) may be available for purchase. Some may even offer a discounted student price. Detailed information will be provided during your on-site orientation.

Consider safety awareness when using new modes of transportation such as trains or bus systems, and observe all local traffic laws. Make sure to follow local rules regarding the purchasing and validation of tickets for transportation. Otherwise, you could be subject to large fines by local authorities. You will receive more information regarding local transportation during the on-site orientation.



Make sure to spend a lot of time in the city you live in. Don't spend every weekend in a different country."

- Kasey Scolavino, USAC Lüneburg Alumna, California State University, Monterey Bay

Rail Passes

For those studying abroad in European countries, a rail pass can be an economical way to visit several different countries in a condensed time period. You can reduce the expense of train travel in most countries by buying a rail pass, which offers you almost unlimited travel for a specified period of time. With a rail pass, you won't have to line up to buy a ticket (though you may still need to make reservations).

Passes are non-transferable and will be forfeited if presented by anyone other than the person to whom they were issued. Presentation of your passport is required.

- Eurail: eurail.com
- Rail Europe: raileurope.com

Field Trips

Many on-site USAC offices and host university groups organize day trips for students. The cost of these day trips is included in the program fee, unless otherwise stated. No refunds are given to students who do not participate. Some sites also organize additional optional overnight trips and activities. The cost and schedule of these activities is determined by the on-site staff or responsible campus organization. Interested students are welcome to participate, but sign up early to ensure your space.

STAYING CONNECTED

Time Difference

Remind your family and friends to consider the time difference when trying to contact you, and consider their time zones as well. The following websites will help you determine world time differences:

- International Time: worldtimeserver.com
- Time and Date: timeanddate.com/worldclock



Email and Social Media

Depending on your location — and the availability of wifi, internet access, and internet cafes — email and social media may be the least expensive and easiest methods of communication while abroad. You may find internet availability on your host university's campus. Program-specific information regarding internet/computer access is given during the on-site orientation.

Privacy and Security on Social Media

The location function used by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms should be avoided while abroad. While it can be a useful tool for staying in touch with friends and relatives back home, posting your location makes your whereabouts public, and potentially puts you at risk. We recommend turning the location features off and taking safety precautions while using social media abroad.

Postal Mail

Most program offices have a place where your mail can be received. This is the safest place to receive your mail or small packages. Specific information regarding mailing addresses for programs is provided in the *Arrival Guide* which is provided before your departure.

Postcards and letters are also a great way to communicate from abroad, but international mail can take from one to three weeks to deliver. For documents that need to be received more urgently, there are many companies, such as FedEx, UPS, and DHL, that provide fast international mail delivery. Express mail services are also helpful when sending any critical documents because they utilize tracking numbers. Shipping large packages home may take up to three months for arrival and can be very expensive.

International Calling Cards

Consider purchasing an international calling card available through companies such as AT&T, MCI, Verizon, Sprint, etc. Call your local telephone service provider for more information. If you purchase a pre-paid calling card prior to going abroad, make sure it is activated before you depart, and check the rates offered in the country of your program site. Also, make sure the card will work to call home from your host country in addition to calling within your host country. Calling cards are widely available at stores and newspaper stands abroad and may offer better rates for that particular country. You may have to compare a few to find the best one for your needs. Student housing is not typically equipped with landline telephones, and you may have to find a local telephone or payphone to make calls using a calling card.

Useful Apps While Studying Abroad

Wifi



Wifi is becoming more available and popular in many countries. Some smartphones can use Wifi with the phone still in airplane mode. Stay connected with family and friends with some of these useful apps.

6 Apps to Download

- 1 WhatsApp** ▶ Send text messages, photos, and audio and group chat with other WhatsApp users for free.
- 2 XE Currency** ▶ Compare the current exchange rates for more than 180 different types of currency.
- 3 Booking.com** ▶ Search for deals on hotels, hostels, apartments, and more in 200 different countries and view locations, pictures, and prices of places, as well as make reservations within the app.
- 4 Google Translate** ▶ Translate whole paragraphs of text between languages. You can also take a picture of signs and have it translated. This app is helpful when communicating with locals and deciphering street signs.
- 5 Instagram** ▶ Share your pictures with the world with this free app. Instantly upload photos to Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Flickr, and Foursquare.
- 6 Facebook & Messenger** ▶ Use FB messenger to call and video chat with people back home. You can also transfer money via Facebook.

Apps to Know About



Allows you to video, voice chat, or message other Skype users for free.



Practice and learn Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese, German, Irish, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish!



Free, fast, detailed, and entirely offline maps with turn-by-turn navigation – trusted by over 70 million travelers worldwide.



A simple way to send and receive money.



Search through thousands of airlines and compare flights to help you find the cheapest deals.



Send your travel photos and messages as physical postcards worldwide.



Available in 50 countries, Uber helps you request a ride and pick up within minutes.



Compare needs and wants to help you save. Monitor your spending and create a budget.



Access maps of cities without wifi. These maps include tips, popular places, and in-depth travel information.



Helps find a local vegan or vegetarian restaurant/café in 180+ countries or search for reviews about a local vegan or vegetarian health food store.

Fees associated with smartphones and apps are subject to change, so be sure to do some research before traveling with your phone overseas. Make sure to turn off the roaming on your phone so as not to incur any excess charges. Also, be aware of possible theft while traveling, in which case, you might want to purchase insurance for your phone or valuables. USAC does not endorse the previous apps. We only want to notify you that there are additional options and services available to you.



Cell Phones

Purchasing a local cell phone — Many students decide to purchase and use a local cell phone while abroad to communicate with their USAC classmates and locals, although such phones are not the best way to remain in contact with friends and family at home. Most students purchase a local pay-as-you-go cell phone, for which they can buy additional minutes as needed. The cost will vary depending on your plan, phone usage, and location, and they are not guaranteed to be available in every country. More specific information and instructions regarding cell phones will be provided during your on-site orientation. All students should update their phone numbers with the US Department of State's STEP program. Students on Partnership Programs should share their phone numbers with their friends and family at home, and students on Specialty Programs must also share their phone numbers with the on-site staff.

Using your current phone — Ask your cellular provider at home to determine if your phone will work in the country where you will be studying and if upgrading to an international plan would save you money. If so, you may be able to unlock the international roaming service to allow calls while abroad. Consider having your phone unlocked so you can replace your current SIM card with a local SIM card (each SIM card has its own number). This will allow you to make and receive local calls, in addition to calling home (roaming charges may apply).

- International Cell Phone Tips: independenttraveler.com/travel-tips/stay-connected/international-cell-phone-guide
- AT&T Study Abroad Cell Phone Plan: corp.att.com/edu/studyabroad/

Journaling

Many students find keeping a journal to be a wonderful way to document and remember their experience abroad. Not only does it provide a valuable record of memories, but it may also help to clarify your attitudes and values. You may be surprised by your own insights. Include thoughts about your initial reaction to the culture, the people, the food, and anything else that leaves an immediate impression.

Reflect on and record what you want to gain from this experience, keeping track of your initial goals and values will help you stay focused on making the experience as meaningful as possible. As you become more immersed in your new setting, your impressions will undoubtedly change, and you may not recall your initial reactions if you don't write them down. Start journaling before your departure, and continue after you return, in order to capture your complete study abroad experience.

Blogging

Blogging is a great way to publish your feelings, experiences, and adventures and to keep in touch with your friends and family. There are many free, easy-to-use blogging sites available. Most even offer privacy settings, allowing only invited guests to view. This option is great for students who want to keep their friends and family updated as their travels unfold. Blogs also enable you to post pictures along with your writing and are highly customizable, allowing you to express your creativity and personality in more than just words. Share your blog links with your Program Advisor, as we enjoy following your study abroad adventures, too!

Use our social tags: @StudyAbroadUSAC, #wherewillyougo

Blogger (Free Blogging Site): blogger.com

TravelBlog: travelblog.org

Tumblr: tumblr.com



LUGGAGE AND PACKING

Refer to the *Packing List* in your **Gateway** account. Research the climate before you begin packing to make sure you are prepared for the weather at your program site for that time of year. Be sensitive to the culture of your program location, and pack according to the local customs.

Packing Tips

Pack light! Students often find they have taken too much luggage and regret it. You will be responsible for carrying your own luggage, so do not pack more than you can easily carry alone. In most cases, you will be able to buy what you need while abroad.

Airlines have strict guidelines on the amount of luggage you can take without additional charges. Research luggage allowances with your airline. Make sure you know the weight and size restrictions, how many bags you can check, and the fees for oversize/overweight bags.

Do not ship anything to your program site prior to departure. The offices have little storage space, and on-site staff may not be available to sign for them when they arrive. Depending on the country, it may be less expensive to buy things directly when on site than to have them sent from home.

Computers

Many students feel the need to take their laptop with them abroad. Read through your USAC resources and talk to past participants to help you decide whether it is best or necessary to take your laptop. Many program sites are very well-equipped with computers on-campus, or they can be found in nearby internet cafes. If you do take a laptop, do not pack it in your checked luggage! Computers (and any valuables) are much more secure in your carry-on luggage. Consider purchasing personal property insurance for laptops and other valuables, as USAC is not responsible for damage, loss, or theft.

Customs and Declarations

Inform your friends and family of customs fees before they send you any packages. You are responsible for paying the customs fees for packages you receive, if applicable. Many students in the past have been charged customs fees for boxes that only contain candy and magazines, as their friends and family have “overdeclared” what was shipped. Advise them to declare packages as “used personal items” to save you from steep fees.

Before returning to your home country, make certain you understand the customs regulations to avoid heavy taxes or possible confiscation of items. You must declare everything you purchased and are bringing back to your home country. Also, remember that you may be charged a customs fee upon your return.



Pack light, bring an open mind, and get ready for the best semester!”

- Riley Wood, USAC Torino Alumna, California State University, Chico

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

In support of USAC's mission to provide opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to succeed in the global society of the 21st century, the Code of Conduct outlines basic responsibilities of USAC participants. Students are expected to take responsibility for their study abroad preparation, for their learning, and for their behavior while abroad. Failure to adhere to these and other common expectations of safety, civility, and academic endeavors can result in dismissal from USAC programs.

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Be prepared

- Assume responsibility for your program preparation.
- Carefully read and review all pre-departure materials made available to you by USAC. Visit the recommended websites relating to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in host countries. Take the initiative to research other websites and resources on your own.
- Participate fully in any orientations.
- Be aware of local attitudes and customs that may present health or safety risks when making daily choices and decisions. Promptly express any health or safety concerns to the program staff or other appropriate individuals.
- Familiarize yourself with the procedures for obtaining emergency health and legal services in the host country.



2. Communicate

- Inform your parents/guardians/family and any others who may need to know about your participation in the study abroad program. Keep them updated and share emergency contact information.
- Follow the program policies and keep USAC on-site staff (like your Program Advisor, if applicable) and your family informed of your whereabouts and well-being. If you will be away for a weekend or holiday break, inform USAC staff and your family of your anticipated travel plans so that you can be contacted in the event of an emergency.
- Disclose any and all pre-existing health concerns on the *Health and Safety Questionnaire* in your **Gateway** account.
- If you develop any health or safety concerns while abroad, contact the USAC on-site staff (Specialty programs) or your Program Advisor (Partnership programs).

3. Understand and comply with policies, procedures, and laws

- Obey all host country laws.
- Avoid any illegal behavior, including possession or use of illegal drugs/paraphernalia, excessive drinking, theft, or vandalism to property.
- Understand and comply with USAC policies and procedures, as well as the host university policies and regulations.
- Abide by any housing agreements or contracts. Make yourself knowledgeable of all residential and behavioral rules and regulations.
- Remain in good standing with USAC, your current or most recent educational institution, and the community.
- Accept responsibility for your own decisions and actions.

4. Be responsible and respectful

- Behave in a manner that is respectful of the rights and well-being of others, and encourage others to behave in a similar manner.
- Be responsible and respectful when dealing with fellow students, faculty, staff, neighbors, homestay families or roommates, and local citizens. You are representing your home university, USAC, and your country while you are studying abroad.
- Understand that actions and behaviors that interrupt, delay, prevent, or interfere with your or others' ability to fully participate in any part of the program are not acceptable, and can result in your dismissal from the program.

- Disorderly, disruptive, threatening, or intimidating behavior, gestures, or actions that endanger the emotional well-being, health, or safety of any person are prohibited, both inside and outside the classroom. This includes, but is not limited to, unwanted sexual contact or harassment, physical abuse, assault, harassment, and threats to or intimidation of any person, student, faculty, or staff member. This also includes the use of social networking sites or any other format to bully, harass, isolate, or intimidate any person, student, faculty, or staff member involved on any USAC program.

Sanctions for violation of the Code of Conduct or other policies enforceable under the Code vary depending on the circumstances. Sanctions may include, but are not limited to, a warning, suspension from program-related activities, removal from housing, dismissal from the program, or denial of participation on future USAC programs.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT

Students participating in USAC Specialty Programs are bound by the *USAC Academic Policy and Procedure document* provided in your **Gateway** account.

Students participating in USAC Partnership Programs are bound by the academic policies of those universities.



FINAL THOUGHTS BEFORE YOU DEPART

It is the students who fully immerse themselves in studying abroad that gain the most from the experience. Actively engage in the local culture whenever possible, be open to new ideas, and enjoy your time abroad. Here are a few more tips from past students for making the most of your adventure.

Get Informed

Research and educate yourself about your host country's social issues, key cultural values, recent history, economic issues, regional concerns, climate, and current events. Pretend that in order to get on the airplane, you have to write a paper on these topics; develop an outline with these categories (or more), and then informally answer the questions. This exercise will put you at greater ease upon arrival, distinguish you from more superficial visitors, help you to cope with culture shock, minimize ethnocentricity, and give you more confidence when interacting with individuals from the host country.



I would recommend that future students ask questions. The advisors and past students know far more information than you would be able to find online by yourself."

- Justin Graber, USAC Alicante Alumnus, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Make New Friends

Upon arrival, you are likely to be exhausted, lonely, excited, and perhaps a bit overwhelmed. Your immediate instinct might be to associate only with people from your home culture. This provides a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and security. After all, you will immediately have a culture and language in common. But the study abroad experience is not all about immediate comfort. A sense of belonging and comfort will come with time as you learn about and immerse yourself in the culture of your host country. This experience is about leaving your cozy "bubble," so resist old patterns of staying with the safe and familiar.



Just go head first! Immerse yourself. You will not regret it"

- Megan Leibensperger, USAC San Sebastián Alumna, Mount Union University



The buddies [local students] really helped us an outstanding amount and I don't think I would have had nearly as good of an experience without them."

- Charles Dunlap, USAC Accra Alumnus Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

Get Involved

Get out there! Explore your new environment to the degree that it is safe to do so. Consider your explorations as opportunities to observe the subtleties of your new setting and to meet people from your host country. Take the initiative to get involved.

- If you will be studying in a country where the language is different from your own, practice your new language everywhere: in shops, pubs, museums, grocery stores, even at the bus station.
- Spend an hour each evening at the dinner table with your host family.
- Sit at a café and talk with a local.
- Sign up for a language partner.
- Join a sports league or other special interest club.

By exploring your new surroundings alone, you will acquire a sense of independence, boost your confidence, and eventually feel as if you belong in your new home. It is not always easy to interact with your adopted world without a support system, but the more you can, the more you will learn from the experience. Make the effort to engage: it is worth it and will make all the difference.

Don't Criticize

To facilitate friendships abroad, keep criticism about your host country or institution to a minimum, even if the people around you don't. As citizens, they have the right to criticize. You, on the other hand, are an outsider, visitor, and guest. You can observe differences, but try not to be judgmental. This is somewhat similar to someone criticizing a member of your family. Such comments are often resented (even when accurate) from an outsider.

Remember that you are an ambassador for USAC, your home university, and your home country. Respect the rights and feelings of others, and encourage your classmates and peers to do the same.

Some Things to Keep in Mind

On-site staff cannot:

- Guarantee or assure the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from study abroad environments.
- Monitor or control all of the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants.
- Prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous, or unwise activities.
- Assure that US standards of due process apply in overseas legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for participants.
- Assume responsibility for the actions of persons not employed or otherwise engaged by the program sponsor, for events that are not part of the program or that are beyond the control of the sponsor and its subcontractors, or for situations that may arise because a participant fails to disclose pertinent information.

Cultural Adjustment

Culture is commonly defined as the collection of learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of people, usually within the same geographic region. When you arrive at your program site, you will quickly observe differences between your own culture and that of your host country. It is important to recognize that you will go through a cycle of adjustment during your time abroad. Phases of this cycle typically include:



Initial Enthusiasm:

(honeymoon phase): high expectations, excitement with trying new things, everything appears exotic and quaint, limited exposure to culture.



Culture Shock:

more realistic and mixed reactions, frustration with differences, feelings of homesickness, no set routine, wider exposure to culture.



Initial Adjustment:

aspects of the culture start to seem "normal," self-reliance arises, positive attitude towards ability to function in the host country.



Acceptance:

re-evaluation of your own cultural values, renewed interest in your host country, comfort with daily routine, appreciation or acceptance for differences that were initially frustrating.

(Adapted from The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook).

Experiencing culture shock at some point during your visit is normal. Acknowledge how you are feeling, but recognize that it will pass and that you are going through a transition phase. Your journal or blog can provide a great outlet to explore and assess your feelings. If you need assistance with adjusting to your new environment while abroad, speak with the on-site staff.

Returning Home

You can expect to go through culture shock on one level or another upon arrival at the program site, but few prepare themselves for the shock of returning home. Reverse culture shock can be just as trying as the initial feeling you experienced abroad — perhaps even more so, because it is unexpected.

Don't forget that the process of assimilating back to your home country is also a valuable learning experience, just like the process of adjusting to living in a foreign country. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about yourself and your beliefs as you readapt to your home environment. Consider joining a local international club or organization, volunteering at your campus international or study abroad office, or finding a language partner to help stay connected with the language of your host country.

USAC also offers information and ideas on the USAC website about how to highlight your international experience on your resume and in future job interviews. It is important to relate your newfound skills from abroad into job skills employers and graduate schools are looking for to set yourself apart from other candidates.

Tips for Parents

Reading about culture shock and reverse culture shock can be extremely helpful when welcoming a student home who has just returned from abroad. There are links available on the USAC website with tips about the best ways to identify with and assist departing and returning students.

- Tips for Cultural Adjustment:
usac.edu/health-and-safety/culture-shock



SUGGESTED PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

Preparations

- Get/renew your passport, make sure it is signed and valid for at least six months after your planned return date.
- Get a visa, if required.
- Pay remaining program balance or send the *Financial Aid Deferment Form* (located on your **Gateway** account) to the USAC Accounting Department.
- Read and submit all required USAC documents and forms in your **Gateway** account.
- Sign up for the optional group flight, if offered, or book your own flight.
- Specialty Program students: complete your *Flight Form*.
- Partnership Program students: email your flight itinerary to your Program Advisor.
- Check your airline(s) for baggage restrictions.
- Purchase personal property insurance for electronics or valuables you will take with you.
- Read your *Arrival Guide* for site-specific arrival instructions, and make sure that your parents or other family member has a copy.





Documents to Copy

Make two copies of the items below; leave a copy with a family member or close friend, and take a copy with you.

- Passport/Visa
- Front and back of all debit/credit cards
- Identification cards
- Prescriptions (vision and medication)
- Flight itinerary
- Arrival Guide*

Legalities

- Register in the STEP program through the US Department of State.
- Complete a Power of Attorney form.
- Get information about absentee voting, if applicable.
- Get information about filing taxes abroad, if applicable.

Health

- Get all vaccinations and/or medications required for the countries in which you will be living and/or visiting.
- Get a list of active and inactive ingredients in your prescription medication(s)
- Get the generic name of your prescription medication(s).
- Have sufficient quantities of prescription medication (and contacts, if needed) to last through your time abroad.
- Make sure it is legal for you to take your prescription medication abroad.
- Visit doctor, dentist, and optometrist, etc., for a check-up.

Course Registration

- Select the courses you plan to take and some alternatives; get them pre-approved by an academic advisor at your home institution to determine if they fulfill graduation or degree requirements.
- If you are required or able to pre-register, check your course registration to make sure you are in the correct courses.
- Purchase required textbooks prior to departure (Specialty Programs).

Insurance

- Contact your insurance company about purchasing additional coverage if you plan to travel before or after your program dates.
- Get a letter confirming full-time student status, if necessary, for your private insurance provider.
- Get additional personal property and personal liability coverage, if you want.

Communication

- Gather all phone numbers, email, and mailing addresses of friends and family.
- Gather phone numbers and email addresses of your home university advisors, financial aid office, and registrar.
- Determine whether your cell phone will work (if you plan on using it while abroad).
- Buy an international calling card and/or set up an international calling plan.
- Establish an email account that can be accessed from abroad.
- Create and test an account with a VoIP internet calling provider to make sure you can connect with whomever you will want to call or video chat.
- Make sure family and friends understand international dialing instructions and have contact phone numbers to reach you while abroad.

Culture

- Research the country and city in which you will be living.
- Research the local weather for the timeframe you'll be living abroad.
- Read books on the culture and the general area.
- Purchase/download a guidebook to use abroad.
- Purchase/download a phrase book and brush up on some basic vocabulary.

Journal/Blog

- Buy a journal (if you want to record your memories in handwritten form).
- Establish an online journal or blog.
- Begin writing in your journal or start blogging prior to departure to capture the entire experience.

Money

- Contact your bank to make sure your ATM card and PIN will work abroad; if you don't have a 4-digit PIN, ask how to use your ATM card abroad.
- Learn what international fees are charged by your bank.
- Look into theft insurance and replacement policies with your ATM and credit card companies.
- Inform your credit card company and bank that you will be out of the country and making transactions from abroad.
- Research the local currency of the country in which you will be studying/traveling; know the exchange rate.
- Put together a budget for your time abroad of estimated and fixed expenses.
- Sign up for online banking.
- Check with your bank to see if they have any partnerships with other international banks to help minimize transaction fees.
- Get an emergencies-only credit card.
- Purchase local currency at a local bank prior to departure or at the international terminal of an airport.

Electricity

- Determine the voltage of the country where you will be living/traveling.
- Determine the plug shape of the country where you will be living/traveling.
- Purchase voltage converters/plug adapters or kits, if needed.

Arrival

- Pack a printed copy of the *Arrival Guide* in your carry-on luggage. This will contain important arrival information, as well as contact numbers for the on-site staff. We also recommend leaving a copy at home with a family member.



FAMILIES & FRIENDS

Congratulations! Your student will be part of the one percent of US college students who study abroad and what an important and excellent decision that is! I would like to commend and thank you for being a part of your student's selection to study abroad with USAC. We know that you and your student may have questions. We hope our website answers many of those for you and gives you an idea of who we are and what we offer as an international education non-profit organization. Please see the detailed materials we provide your student, and contact us with any uncertainties.

For over 36 years, we have created and managed international programs with a strong commitment to high quality academics, culture and language learning, immersion and interaction with the local community and host university, and an overall well-rounded experience abroad for students. We have helped over 50,000 students since we began in 1982 and we are proud of the 95% recommendation rate students give us.

Personally, I was fortunate to have family and friends who were encouraging and supportive of my education and wellbeing while I studied abroad. My parents were educators and instilled in me a great passion and appreciation for learning—and to have the chance to do it in an international setting, complementing my undergraduate and graduate education, was icing on the cake! Like your student and all USAC students, I was able to earn credits toward my major and minor, complete an internship, fine-tune my foreign language skills, make international friends and contacts, and develop personal and professional skills that would be a major asset to my future career and to who I am today. A large part of the learning and growing resulted from the experience itself, outside of the classroom—with all its challenges and moments where I had to stand on my own two feet.

We at USAC know that studying abroad is an incredible growth opportunity and we take that very seriously. Our veteran staff and support services abroad assist your student as needed; however, at the same time, many of the benefits of study abroad stem from students learning to be independent and to resolve issues on their own. They will face and overcome inevitable challenges that come up while in another country, similar to the experiences they had when going to university for the first time. Some homesickness, doubts, and even some tears are common as students get settled in and learn their way around a new culture.

We ask you to empower, not enable. As a parent, it can be challenging to resist the temptation of getting involved in situations that your student is able to handle on their own. The best help you can give is encouragement to act independently, the confidence to do so, and the opportunity to try.

Your student is in great hands. We provide support and services to over 4,000 students each year. We love our job and are committed to making USAC programs the best they can be for students like yours. It is our goal to prepare and guide you and your student through an amazing, quality, academically strong, and unique study abroad experience. We sincerely hope that when your student returns home from their time with USAC, you all will feel you made the right decision—like one student's mother who recently wrote me:

"I was waiting in the airport to pick up my daughter after her successful semester abroad. I saw many other families there too, happy and excited to welcome their students home. When I saw the excitement and happiness, I knew USAC does a good thing. Thank you USAC."

Best,



Alyssa Nota, Ph.D.
USAC CEO & President



Preparations and Program Research

STEP 1 – Read through the information in this Toolkit. The student section, located in the front, has valuable information and recommendations, and this section highlights all the information available and ways you can support your student throughout their study abroad process.

STEP 2 – Check out your student’s program on our website:
usac.edu/study-abroad-programs

Did you know...?

When you click on any program you’ll see information on:

- Calendar dates for each term
- On-site activities, internships, tours, and field studies
- Course descriptions
- Interactive budget sheets
- Housing information
- Photos and videos

STEP 3 – Visit our page just for parents: usac.edu/parents

We felt that the entire USAC process and program was great, they answered any questions we had both before and during the semester. Personally I felt that USAC delivered on all that it promised and that is a rare quality in a study abroad program.”

- Stephen Levine, parent of USAC Prague student

Learn from other parents

Visit our testimonials page to hear about other families who have sent their student on a USAC program. Learn about how studying abroad through USAC impacted their student at usac.edu/parents

Once your student is abroad, fill out their contact information in the inside back cover of this Toolkit.

Remember that your student may not be able to contact you immediately when they arrive abroad. Students are often busy checking into their housing, attending orientation, making new friends, etc., so it is recommended that you agree on a later check-in time for calling home.

WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR STUDENT

One of the best ways you can support your student is to keep an open line of communication, but understand the primary contact with USAC should be your student. We're sure you will have questions, but it is important that you let your student take the lead in all aspects of their study abroad preparations to ensure they get the most out of the experience. Allowing your student to be responsible for their own preparations and research helps them grow as an individual, become independent, and gain confidence.

Talk to your student about your questions, and encourage them to research the answers, as many of the answers are available on their USAC **Gateway** account. Your student will receive detailed information from USAC throughout the pre-departure process. We encourage you to check in with your student to continue getting updates up until departure. We have listed a few discussion points below to get you started and familiarize yourself with all the resources available.

What resources does USAC make available to your student?

USAC website: calendar dates, on-site activities, internships, course information, interactive budget sheets.

USAC Gateway account: specific housing information, the visa process, arrival on-site instructions, health insurance, academics, scholarships, a planning guide, cultural tips.

USAC Program Advisor: Your student's main contact for questions about the program site, housing abroad, student visa process, travel plans, health and safety, pre-departure and arrival information.

Other USAC contacts: The USAC Central Office has staff to answer site-specific questions on admissions, courses, grades, USAC fees, and scholarships.

Past USAC Participants: Students can talk to alumni about their program and experiences.

What type of program did your student choose?



Partnership or Specialty? This may dictate the following:

- What level of support from USAC is available on-site?
- Will there be anyone from their program to meet them at the airport?
- What responsibilities do they have in arranging their housing?
- Is there an additional application to the host institution?
- Are there field trips offered for their program?

Has your student thought about budgeting?

- What are they doing now to save for their program?
- Have they looked at the USAC interactive budget sheets to help plan financially for their time abroad?
- Does your student know when payments are due and how they can pay?
- Has your student reviewed the Money Matters section of USAC's website?
- Has your student talked to their home university's financial aid office about applying for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)?
- Has your student applied for scholarships?

Talk to your student about the host country. What have they researched?

Ideas to research:

- Current events
- History
- Culture
- Language
- Places to visit

Talk to your student about health and safety abroad.

- Have they visited a doctor before departure?
- Do they need any vaccinations? See the Center for Disease Control’s Health Travel website to find out. [cdc.gov/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel)
- Do they have a plan for obtaining medication while abroad (if necessary)?
- Do they have copies of their prescriptions, passport, accounts, and passwords?

WHAT COMMUNICATION TO EXPECT FROM USAC

The USAC application asks students to list a primary and secondary contact. This



This was a wonderful, memorable, once-in-a-lifetime experience for our daughter. Our thanks go out to the entire USAC team, in the US and Italy, for making our daughter feel safe, welcome, and valued, and for providing an exceptional learning experience.”

- Mark Dudley, parent of USAC Viterbo student

section describes how USAC will involve whomever is listed as a student’s primary/secondary contact.

What will communication look like from USAC?

Expect the majority of communication to be directly with your student. It is your student’s responsibility to keep you updated on their study abroad program, not USAC’s. This is an opportunity for your student to become more independent and self-sufficient — necessary skills to have while studying abroad and vital for success in a future career.

Your student will hear from their USAC Program Advisor at least once a month, if not more. Program Advisors will email each student information specific to their program, as well as reminders on deadlines and any missing documents.



Can I get my student's USAC Gateway account login information?

USAC will not release a student's **Gateway** login information to anyone. If you wish to log in to your student's **Gateway**, your student must provide you their username and password.

Can I contact USAC directly?

Yes, but expect your student to be involved in the conversation as we prefer to include students in all communication. The questions you are asking are important for your student to know as well.

Can USAC disclose specific information about my student's program?

We respect the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Your student must list you as their primary or secondary contact for USAC to disclose certain information.

Can I contact USAC after hours?

Our office hours are 8 am to 5 pm (PST), Monday–Friday.

We do have an after-hours emergency phone line that connects to our on-call staff members personal cell phone. Our emergency staff is on-call 24 hours a day. To access it, call the USAC main line at 1-866-404-8722 (775-784-6569). This phone line is reserved for actual emergencies. General questions and non-crisis issues/concerns are not emergencies and therefore will not be acted on until our office opens for regular office hours. Please account for the time difference when calling.

Examples of a non-emergency would be if your student's payment deadline is the next day and you are having issues with the payment.

Will I be receiving anything from USAC?

You will be receiving two things from USAC:

This Study Abroad Toolkit

Arrival Guide - Emailed to student's primary and secondary contact. This guide provides on-site emergency contact information, arrival instructions, airport information, packing list for carry-on luggage, and important program dates. Expect this approximately one month prior to your student's program start date.

Important Notes, Email Addresses, and Phone Numbers

Home University Study Abroad Advisor:

Home University Major/Minor Advisor:

Home University Financial Aid Office:

Home University Registrar:

USAC Program Advisor:

On-site Contact Information (see Arrival Guide or Emergency Procedures from on-site orientation):

Nearest Embassy or Consulate at Program Site (see Arrival Guide or Emergency Procedures from on-site orientation):

Local Emergency Services at Program Site:

USAC Central Office: 1-866-404-USAC (toll-free in the US) or 775-784-6569

USAC general email: studyabroad@usac.edu

USAC Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram: @studyabroadusac





Come without expectations and don't get caught up in planning too far ahead. Enjoy every moment and let this beautiful culture shape your perspective of this corner of the world."

- Sarah Erickson, USAC Puntarenas Alumna, Azusa Pacific University



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