Guidebook to Study Abroad for Family & Friends

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Message from the Associate Director

We are thrilled that your student has chosen to study abroad and we look forward to working with them. We also recognize that parents form an integral part of the Study Abroad experience, and hope that you’ll come to think of our staff as your contact for any questions you have, during preparation and while your student is away.

In preparation for departure, students are required to read the student handbook that takes them through the planning process and is a guide for their time abroad. The more informed your student is about the city in which they will live, the better prepared they will be to acclimate to a new culture. Please talk with your student about studying abroad! Though we do everything we can to make the study abroad experience educationally and personally rewarding, the single best thing you can do to get your student ready is discuss what it means to be abroad. Things will, and should be, very different from what we’re used to in the United States. The net result is that studying abroad opens up a world of opportunity and cultural difference to students. Encourage them to dive headlong into it, of course, but also make sure that they’re prepared for the realities of a different country, with different expectations, attitudes, and customs.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at 925.631.4107.

Sincerely,

Maria D. Flores, Associate Director
Center for International Programs
Saint Mary’s College of California

Why Study Abroad?

Students who choose to study abroad formulate an opinion on the importance of study abroad early in their college careers. These students are motivated to study abroad for a combination of reasons. First of all, it enhances the educational experience of college students. Some students study abroad in order to fulfill a major requirement, others travel in order to advance their understanding of a specific culture or to develop fluency in a language. Another reason why your student may want to study abroad would be to acquire personal knowledge and to immerse his/herself in a cultural experience for the purpose of study.

In your eyes your student may already be a very capable and independent adult. However, during their time abroad, students will need your support in one form or another. Your student will have the exciting opportunity to explore a new country and depending on the program, this exploration will occur with unusual tools; unfamiliar language and culture. This guidebook informs friends and family on ways to support your student in an unfamiliar form during this exciting endeavor.
The Benefits of Study Abroad

As a result of studying abroad students carry a different perspective of the world. Your student may have studied abroad to gain fluency in another language, but attained other wonderful rewards. Study abroad students grow in self-knowledge by challenging themselves. Once the student engulfs his/herself in a celebration of diversity, new culture, and new language as a result of a broadened scope. A range of inspirations surface once the student has grasped a sense of self. There is the possibility of a career opportunity or discovering a passion.

Study abroad allows students to defy conventional concepts with courage. Students live their dreams and accomplish those things held only in their imagination. Families are asked primarily to practice patience with their student. Friends may want to also offer their support by encouraging the student in future endeavors. Listen to your student’s experience ask him/her about the experience. Sometimes students will not realize the impact of the experience until they discuss it with a person with an attentive ear. Study abroad brings forth an attitude of willingness and endurance unparallel to other experiences. There are other advantages of study abroad, which you and your student will become aware of with the passing of time. The opportunity to study abroad is a gift with continual benefits.

3 Tips for Family and Friends

#1 Know Your Student’s Program
Be informed about your student’s study abroad decision. Continue to be informed about your student’s program while the student is in country.

#2 Be Aware of Health and Safety
Communicate with your student and discuss travel plans independent of the study abroad program. Also discuss any safety and behavior issues related to travels and activities.

Keep yourself updated by visiting the State Department website for specific information pertaining to an individual country and general information about travel and safety.

Informative link: http://travel.state.gov

#3 Keep Contact and Student Information
Make sure you have multiple contacts such as student’s home number, cell phone and email address.

Your student will have Saint Mary’s contact information. Obtain contact information from your student once he/she has arrived.

Have a copy of student’s passport and flight itinerary.

3 Tips taken from CEA website: (http://www.gowithcea.com/safety.html/itemid=tips)
Responsibilities of Parents and Guardians:

- Obtain and evaluate safety information concerning the study abroad location.
- Be involved in the decision of the student to participate in a particular program.
- Engage the student in a thorough discussion of safety and behavior issues related to the program overseas.

What Saint Mary’s College / Program Providers Cannot Do:

- Guarantee the safety of participants.
- Assure that risk abroad will not be greater than at home.
- Monitor the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants.
- Stand in place of parents (in loco parentis).
- Prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous, or unwise activities.
- Represent the interests of participants’ accused of illegal activities.
- Assume responsibility for the actions of persons not employed by or otherwise engaged by the study abroad program operator.
- Assume responsibility for events that are beyond the control of the provider and its subcontractors.
- Assure that participants will only be accepted to sites that are appropriate to their personal limitations.
- Assume responsibility for situations which arise due to the failure of a participant to make full disclosure of pertinent information prior to departure.
- Assure the adherence to U.S. norms of what is appropriate and acceptable behavior in matters of due process, individual rights, “political correctness” and sensitivity to others, relationships between the sexes, and among diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic groups.

Contact Saint Mary’s College and /or program operator with health and safety related questions.

The Process: What to Expect

Cross Cultural Cycle - Each stage in this process is characterized by “symptoms” and/or inward signs representing certain kinds of behavior

* Honeymoon Period: At first your student will be very excited by the new scenery and culture.

* Culture Shock: Your student may become stressed, possibly as a result of comprehending the language, transportation methods, and familiarizing his/herself with new food and friends. Your student may question their choice to study abroad.

* Initial Adjustment: The student may not yet be perfectly fluent in the language spoken or completely settled into a foreign location, but basic ideas can be expressed.

* Mental Isolation: Your student might be frustrated because of the separation from families and friends. At this point students need encouragement keep in mind that some students do not move past this stage.

* Acceptance and Integration: Your student feels comfortable with friends and has stabilized a routine.

* Return Anxiety, Re-Entry Shock, Re-Integration: The student who has adjusted the best to the new culture will probably find the return home the most difficult. Upon return your student will want to maintain cultural connections they have gained.
**Essential Documents**

Each student will need a passport to travel overseas and it is recommended that the passport be valid for 180 days beyond the end of the program. Have your student make copies of the information pages and leave them in a known location prior to departure. Consider keeping a copy of airline tickets, rail passes, traveler’s check numbers, visas and other important information with a copy of your student’s passport. A visa is a document attached to the student’s passport obtained from the country of residence. Some programs recommend the student obtain International Student I.D. Study abroad programs require medical insurance. SMC insurance policy does cover you overseas. Contact other insurance companies before you go. For international travel, your insurance should cover major medical, emergency evaluation, repatriation, and emergency help line.

**Money Matters**

ATM’s and Credit Cards

In many countries, the simplest way to access cash is through an Automated Teller Machine (ATM). An ATM card, either for your student’s account in the U.S. or a shared account with you and your student, provides access to funds from any bank that is linked to an international ATM system such as PLUS or CIRRUS.

Be aware that not all ATMs abroad are linked to international systems, so check with your student’s bank before your student departs. Some smaller towns may not have service available at all. Your student’s local bank will be able to provide information on cash-point locations and procedures for using the ATM card overseas. The student will need a PIN number.

If your student finds his/herself short of money during the semester, there are a number of ways to transfer funds overseas; ATM cards and credit cards are the most convenient. If you do not have a credit card or access to an international ATM network, you must explore other options such as travelers checks.

* Here are a few expenses **NOT** included in the cost of a Saint Mary’s study abroad program.
  - **Meals** (some programs) * **Textbooks**
  - **Museum Entrance Fees** * **Independent Travel**
  - **Incidental personal needs**
  - **Cell Phones and Communication Costs**
    - **International Connections**

**Mail / Email / Skype**

There is nothing like receiving a traditional hand-written letter in the mail sent with thought and love. You can obtain your student’s mailing address once he/she has arrived at the destination location. Take note that shipping prices are determined by weight and international shipping can be costly.

E-mail is a great way to contact your student while abroad. With e-mail you can correspond with your student on a regular basis without the hassle of time difference.

New technologies allow us to stay connected to our students around the world through downloadable software like Skype (www.skype.com) which allows parents to make free Skype-to-Skype calls and low cost calls to landlines and cell phones around the world.

**Telephone Cards**

In some locations setting up a cell phone may be cost efficient and convenient, but phone cards are also good options. A calling card is easy to carry and the international dialing instructions are on the card. Here are the basics:
1. International access code: 011
2. Country code (2- or 3-digit number)
3. Area/city code (1- to 5-digit number)
4. Local number abroad
**Visits**
During your student’s semester overseas, time will be his/her most precious possession. Attendance is important, and your student’s grades will be affected if he/she is absent during regularly scheduled courses and mandatory field trips. If you or family friends are planning to visit the student overseas, we encourage visitors to delay their trip until the mid-semester break or after the semester is over, when the student will have more time. Family members should not expect to stay with the student host family, or in his or her apartment.

**Maintain a Level of Distance**
It is by overcoming any difficulties that your son or daughter will quickly rise to a new level of independence, so avoid the temptation to become too involved. Ultimately, this is his or her learning experience.

**Keep Up-to-Date Stateside**
You may have to help handle some things for your son or daughter while he or she is abroad, such as:
- Renewing a driver’s license
- Registering to vote or requesting an absentee ballot
- Filing income taxes
- Paying monthly credit card bills
- Preparing for next semester at the home school (open mail from the college and remind your student)
  - Registering for classes
  - Selecting a housing option
  - Preparing forms to continue financial aid

**FAQs**
How much will the Study Abroad cost?
1. Saint Mary’s College Program
2. Lasallian Study Abroad Consortium
3. Exchange Programs
   - Will all grades/credits be accepted by the home university?
   - Questions for the student’s advisor should include
   - How long is a study abroad program?
   - Why does one need study abroad insurance?
   - How much spending money is needed?
   - Where can the student exchange money?
   - What are Travelers Checks and where can they be obtained/used?
   - What are the housing options?
   - What documents are needed to travel abroad?
   - Will the student be able to communicate without having a firm grasp of the language?
   - What will the food be like?
   - How can we keep in touch with the student while they are abroad?
How much will Study Abroad cost?

1. Saint Mary’s College Program

When applicants are approved to study abroad on a Saint Mary’s College study abroad program all federal, state and Saint Mary's College financial aid will be applied. Students are required to pay for the following:

- SMC-sponsored program participants pay SMC full time tuition fees and housing fees.
- For more information on fees please visit: [http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/study-abroad/prospective-student/program-options-by-type](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/study-abroad/prospective-student/program-options-by-type)
- Students participating in SMC-sponsored programs will receive a $500 Travel Credit on their GaelXpress account.
- Spending money while students are abroad

2. Lasallian Study Abroad Consortium

When applicants are approved to study abroad on Lassalian Consortium programs, all federal, state and Saint Mary's College financial aid will be applied. Students are required to pay for the following:

- Lasallian study abroad participants pay SMC full time tuition fees and housing fees.
- For more information on fees please visit: [http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/study-abroad/prospective-student/program-options-by-type](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/study-abroad/prospective-student/program-options-by-type)
- Students participating in Lasallian programs will receive a $500 Travel Credit on their GaelXpress account.
- Spending money while students are abroad

3. Exchange Programs

When applicants are approved to study abroad on an exchange program, all federal, state and Saint Mary’s College financial aid will be applied. Students are required to pay the following:

- Exchange study abroad participants pay SMC full time tuition fees.
- Students pay their housing fees on-site
- Spending money while students are abroad

4. Non-Saint Mary’s Program

When applicants are approved by the International Programs Coordinating Committee for a non-Saint Mary’s College study abroad program, all government financial aid will be applied, however no Saint Mary’s College financial aid will be transfer. Students take a leave of absence from SMC and pay all cost directly to the Program Provider.

Will all grades/credits be accepted by the home university?

Prior to the acceptance of a study abroad program, be sure to have all the information regarding the credit/grade approval process requirements from the home institution. Generally, the courses/classes the student plans to take abroad must be preapproved by their study abroad advisor, the registrar, faculty advisor, dean or admissions officer, to ensure the maximum amount of credit for the courses
taken will be received. If the course information is not available until arrival at the study abroad location, be sure to find out what specific information is needed upon return to make sure the courses are accepted by the home institution.

“It is essential to get approval in advance - and in writing.”

**Questions for the student’s advisor should include:**

Will all of the classes my student plans to take fulfill his/her graduation requirements and count towards his/her academic major/minor where applicable?

*Does my student’s current institution require that he/she enroll in a defined number of courses/credits in order for transfer credits to be accepted?*

*What is the minimum course grade that will be accepted for credit transfer?*

*Is it required that course related information such as a syllabus, notes, exams, papers, fieldwork, etc. be furnished upon return?*

*Will the grade points from classes taken abroad be included in the GPA at his/her home institution, or will only the credits be accepted?*

*Will my students need to “withdraw” from his/her current institution if the chosen program is through another school, and then reapply in order to return the following semester/session? If so, what paperwork will need to complete prior to departure to make sure he/she is correctly reinstated upon return? Do course selection forms for the next semester/session need to be completed prior to departure?*

**How long is a study abroad program?**

The program duration depends on the program chosen. Study abroad programs generally range from four to five months. The amount of time the student is able to spend abroad and the time of year he/she chooses to go abroad can be determined by answering a few simple questions:

*How much time will the home institution approve for travel abroad and still accept the credits?*

*Will he/she be focused enough to fulfill a specific curriculum and still fully experience the culture if the stay is only a few weeks? Will there be enough time for independent travel within this timeframe?*

*Will he/she be disciplined enough to follow through on their courses if too much time is spent abroad? Will he/she have enough spending money to stay for a long period of time and still be able to eat, travel independently, etc?*

*Will the weather be comfortable enough in the country of choice at this time of the year?*

NOTE: Be sure your student knows if his/her home institution requires that a certain number of credits be fulfilled at the home campus, immediately prior to graduation or he/she may need to spend an extra semester or two on campus after returning from the study abroad location!

**Will students have health insurance abroad?**

SMC requires all study abroad students show proof of health insurance coverage while they are overseas. Students participating in SMC, Exchange or Lasallian programs will have health insurance coverage provided for them. Students participating in Non-SMC study abroad programs need to check with their study abroad provider if
health insurance is included. If not, Non-SMC study abroad participants need to purchase their own overseas health insurance.

**How much spending money is needed?**

The amount of money that will be needed for the trip depends on the expenses that the student may be required to pay while abroad. It is a good idea to create a budget prior to departure that separates any known living and school expenses such as food, housing, transportation and text books from general spending money that can be used for independent travel, tourist attraction entrance fees and souvenirs. Keep in mind that having a budget does not mean that the student needs to have to carry cash around for each of these expenses – just know about how much is allotted to each so money for meals is not spent carelessly on souvenirs!

Always remember:

“Traveling with large amounts of cash is not recommended.”

The student should consider using several different forms of payment for expenses. Traveler’s checks, credit cards, ATM cards and cash are accepted almost everywhere. Although U.S. dollars are also widely accepted throughout the world, the student should make every attempt to use the local currency.

**Where can the student exchange money?**

To obtain foreign currency, any of the following can be used:

**AIRPORT EXCHANGE BUREAU** - Currency exchange offices are available at almost all international airports. Although the rates may not be the lowest, it is probably the most convenient location to exchange money when the student first arrives. Note: because the destination airport is certain to have a large supply of the local currency, its rates for exchange may only have a limited supply of the foreign currency.

**BANKS/ATM/CREDIT CARDS** - After the student has had a chance to get accustomed to his/her new surroundings, a national bank or an ATM machine can be found, which are known to offer the lowest exchange rates. Using a credit card can also secure a decent exchange rate and is often safer than carrying around a lot of cash. American Express, Visa and Master Card are all widely accepted around the world. Keep in mind, however, that using an ATM/debit card may incur additional bank/commission charges.

**LOCAL STORES/RESTAURANTS** - Travelers checks can be used for payment at a variety of stores or restaurants. If U.S. dollar travelers checks are being used instead of foreign currency traveler’s checks, make sure the student knows the merchant’s exchange rate and is aware of how much change should be returned to them.

With all the money changing options available, the best thing the student can do is to be an educated traveler. Know what the current exchange rate is and be able to calculate how much should be received in return for each transaction. Also, be safe when carrying money and do not carry all of it at once.
What are the housing options?

The housing options depend entirely upon the program that is being offered. Many students are expected to live on campus in either single or double occupancy dorm rooms. Others may have the option to live off campus in apartments or participate in a home stay and live in the home of a nearby family. If the student is expected to arrange his/her own housing, ask for recommendations from the sponsoring institution because student housing in foreign countries is not always easy to come by and may be expensive. It is also a good idea to find out what is included in the housing package (meals, linens, etc.) so your child will not be caught off guard with any unexpected expenses.

What documents are needed to travel abroad?

Please note: This is only a sample list of documents that may be required for International travel. The actual documents your student will need vary depending on the location of the program. Be sure to contact the hosting institution for official pre-departure information. In all cases, fill out any applications and make all necessary appointments for each document well in advance as it can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months to complete the process.

PASSPORT- The most widely used form of identification used for international travel is a passport. Almost all foreign countries require that visitors have a passport. For more information regarding the application/renewal process, check out the following website:

travel.state.gov/passport_services.html, or call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778.

VISA- A visa is a permit from an international country that allows all visitors to enter and leave their borders and may be required for the chosen program or by any countries that the student plans to visit while traveling independently. Visas often list planned travel dates and do expire, so be sure to have these date available when applying. For more information about visas and how to apply, look on-line at travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html.

Please note: A visa must be obtained prior to departure, so check with the hosting institution as soon as possible to verify if one is needed.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC) – Although not usually required, the ISIC may be a valuable document for which to apply. In addition to being a student identification card, it may help your student qualify for discounts on airfare, travel insurance, medical and health assistance, and entrance fees to museums and other cultural sites around the world. This card can be purchased through various Web sites, travel agencies or from many US colleges and universities. Search the following Web site for more information about how to obtain a card:

www.internationalstudentidcard.com

INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATE OF VACCINATIONS- The student may be required to obtain a number of different vaccinations prior to entering a foreign country. The list of required vaccinations and facilities that can provide these vaccinations should be obtained from the study abroad department of the hosting university. When traveling to developing countries, the following vaccinations are usually required: typhoid fever, hepatitis A and B, cholera and yellow fever. Anti-malarial medication may also
be recommended. It is also suggested that a list of
crudity immunization be obtained from your family
physician (these may include: tetanus, polio, diphtheria,
etc.) and update these immunizations if needed.

**Will the student be able to communicate without having a firm grasp of the language?**

It is possible that wherever the student goes, he/she will be able to find someone that speaks even little English, but it is always beneficial for the student to make every effort to learn the local language, or at least some key phrases, as it will enable him/her to make the most out of the study abroad experience. If your child is not comfortable with the language, a program should be selected where the courses are taught in English. Another option is to enroll in an intensive language class prior to departure.

**What will the food be like?**

Chances are, the food in the country abroad is not going to be like the food many of us are used to eating at home. Although this can be a wonderful part of the experience, it may be difficult or even painful for some. Be sure to follow the host school or host family’s guidelines about what precautions to take when sampling local foods and drinks. (Note: in areas where it is not safe to drink the water, remember that ice, fruit juices and even vegetables and fruits washed in the water should be avoided if at all possible.) Your student will be surprised, however, to find that many popular fast food chain restaurants from the United States can also be found all over the world!

Visit [www.cdc.gov/travel/foodwater.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/foodwater.htm) for more information about food and water precautions.

**How can we keep in touch with the student while they are abroad?**

Postal mail, telephone, fax and email are all available means by which to communicate with students abroad. While rates may be higher to connect overseas, the services work very similar to those here in the United States. A popular option used by many students is to obtain a phone card/calling card from your current long-distance carrier. Be sure to find out the appropriate access numbers for the United States as they vary from country to country. Here is another tip from the ‘It’s Your World’ handbook:

“Remember to remind the people at home that you may not have a phone immediately available. As a result you may not be able to phone them as soon as you arrive. Agree on a time by which you definitely will have called home.”

The full version of the ‘It’s Your World’ handbook by Bill Hoffa, is available online courtesy of Study Abroad.com
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