

Checklist – Practical Preparation for Study and Work Abroad

Are you planning to study or work internationally? Great! Before you leave, make sure you have made all the necessary preparations. While packing tends to be left to the last minute, if you are going to be spending several weeks or months in a country, you need to make plans starting months in advance. This is especially true when it comes to travel documents like visas, money, and plans for using electronics while abroad.

Safety Precautions

Before you leave for a new country, make sure you know what the potential hazards are in that country, and what will be different from home. See the [Canadian Travel Advice and Advisories](http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories) (<http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>) website for information on safety precautions for travel to each country. This includes information on visa requirements, health services and concerns, relevant laws, and more. It also warns you of any immediate security risks that warrant cancelling or altering your travel plans.

University Requirements

Talk to your home university about your program and how transfer credits will work. Here are some suggestions of questions to ask your advisor (and make sure to get answers in writing if you are at all uncertain):

Will my program count for credit back home? Will it count for academic credit or work term/co-op credit? What will be the difference on my final transcript/diploma?

How many credits will this program give me? At what course level?

Will the grades from my program appear on my home transcript? Will the university have access to the grades from my program?

Will this program count towards my residency requirement (number of courses that have to be taken at the home university to graduate)?

Will the courses I take during my program count towards my major? My minor? My certificate program?

What will I have to do to have my grades and credits calculated? Will I need to provide detailed syllabi from each course I take? When will my grades and credits be calculated? Will they be calculated before or after I return from my program?

What will the university I am attending require in terms of class attendance? If I miss a certain number of classes (eg. for travelling), will I lose credits and/or marks?

Travel Documents

Passport – Is your passport up to date? It should be valid until at least 6 months after your return date. If not, make sure to have it renewed before you go abroad.

Visa – How long will you be abroad? Check with an embassy for the country you are visiting to find out about visa requirements. This includes any countries you plan on travelling to for any length of time during your trip. Many programs require you to have a student visa and/or resident permit to register for classes, even if you will not be in the country for very long. Start this process early, as it can take more than three months to get a visa.

(***Note:** If you will be travelling to more than one location or will be exiting and re-entering the country at various times during your stay, make sure to get accurate information on visa requirements. Many countries or regions require you to have specific visas for travel or re-entry, and some visas apply to entire regions. For example, if you travel to Europe during the summer before your term starts and stay in Europe more than 90 days, you will require a visa that is valid throughout the region and time period of your travels.)

Boarding pass – Book your flights well in advance to ensure cheaper prices and convenient travel times. Some countries (with stricter visa requirements) may also require you to have a return flight booked prior to entry.

Addresses and Contact Information – Write out the contact information for everywhere you plan to stay and especially for where you will be spending your first night (and how you will be getting there, with train or bus details and confirmations printed out). You may not have Internet access immediately upon arrival, so you should not rely on the ability to access this information online. Also provide someone at home with your itinerary in case of emergency.

Identification – Bring copies of your driver's license, birth certificate, credit cards, passport, and any other appropriate identification. Consider applying for an International Student Identification Card (ISIC), which will give you discounts on museums, attractions, and transportation in many countries. Your host school or organization may provide you with a student ID that will be beneficial in your host country, but it will likely not be valid if you travel to other countries during your trip. Also leave a photocopy of all relevant identification at home and at your place of residence in your host country, in case of theft or lost items. In some countries, such as Russia, it may be advisable to carry only copies of your identification, rather than the originals.

Proof of Insurance – Many universities will require or recommend that you provide proof of extended medical insurance that will be valid for your time abroad. Bring both a print and an electronic copy of proof of insurance if possible.

Proof of Medical Testing – Some countries will require you to show proof that your vaccinations are up-to-date, especially if you will be working in high-risk programs. You

will likely need a note from your doctor confirming that you are medically fit to study or work abroad, but you may need additional documentation, such as testing for HIV or tuberculosis. Check the documentation requirements early, as this may be necessary for you to obtain a visa, and the process can be time-consuming.

Money

Credit cards – Make sure your credit cards will be valid for the entire period of time you are abroad. Some credit cards may charge you for transactions abroad, so check with your bank to avoid excessive fees.

Debit cards – Make sure your debit cards will be valid for the entire period of time you are abroad. Some debit cards may charge you for transactions abroad (sometimes at a much higher rate than you expect at home), so check with your bank to avoid excessive fees. Ensure that you have sufficient funds in your bank account for the entire time you are abroad, and talk to your bank to ensure that your card will not be cancelled while you are abroad. (Many banks will view transactions abroad as “suspicious activity” if they are not notified of your travel plans in advance.)

Cash – If possible, bring some cash in the currency of your destination country, as it is sometimes difficult to exchange currencies when you first arrive, especially in rural areas where you may be arriving by bus or train. If this is not possible (some currencies are not available in Canada), bring some Canadian money that can be converted upon arrival (enough to cover any immediate expenses in case your credit cards are not working or there are no available ATMs).

Scholarships – See UVic’s information on [financing your study abroad program](#). Also look at government and organizational scholarship opportunities based on the particulars of your international program – many opportunities exist, and scholarships often go unclaimed as very few students are aware of their existence. Apply for scholarships and financial aid early to ensure you have the funds you need to participate in your program.

Receipts – While abroad, keep receipts for any major purchases and currency exchanges and for anything you plan to bring back with you. Having these organized and accessible will be invaluable when filling out Customs Declaration Cards and in the event you need to return an item. (It is very common when living abroad to find that an item you have purchased does not work the same way in your host country as it does back home.) Similarly, you may be able to claim Value-Added Tax refunds. Some programs will also reimburse certain purchases, such as textbooks, if receipts are provided.

Electronics

***Note:** Remember to bring chargers for every electronic device you plan on taking with you.

Outlet adaptors – Bring at least one outlet adaptor for the local outlets, and make sure it is safe to use with your appliances. Some larger plugs (such as MacBook chargers) may

fall out of small or flimsy adaptors. If voltage levels are different in your destination country, bring a current converter.

Camera – You will want to take pictures on your trip, so make sure to bring a camera, along with a charger and a cable to transfer pictures to your computer. If you are bringing a cell phone (see below), you may choose to use this as your camera instead.

Cell phone – Decide whether you need a cell phone while abroad. This will depend on whether you have regular access to the Internet, whether you will be primarily with other international students (who are unlikely to have their own cell phones) or local students and workers, and whether your destination country has readily available cell phone service. Canadian travel plans are often extremely expensive, so if you do choose to have a cell phone, consider buying a cheap phone when you arrive. You can also purchase a SIM card for your phone upon arrival, but many Canadian phones (such as iPhones) will have to be unlocked prior to departure for this to work. Given that cell phone service and plans can vary greatly from country to country, you may wish to make decisions about how you will proceed after you arrive and are able to discuss your needs with local advisors.

Computer – Decide whether you need a laptop computer. Where will you be staying? Does your place of residence have computers available? Will you have easy access to university or library computers? Will you be expected to use a personal computer to take notes or write assignments for class? Is a computer likely to be stolen? Electronics and valuables always risk being lost or stolen when you travel abroad, so don't bring anything you can't afford to lose. Consider backing up everything on your computer before you leave and using a web-based system to back-up your files while you are away.

Internet – Find out before you leave whether you will have Internet access. If there is no Wireless Internet access, consider buying an Internet stick upon arrival. These sticks, which plug into a USB port on your computer, carry a SIM card and will give you limited data for (usually 3G) Internet on your device. Some buildings may also have wired Internet, which can be accessed using an Ethernet cable. Note that in some parts of the world a reliable Internet connection may be difficult or impossible to find, even with an Internet stick.

Other electronic devices – Do you need to bring an MP3 player? A flashlight? A portable GPS? A hair straightener? Figure out what you will need and whether you have the appropriate adaptors and converters, as some electronic devices will be seriously damaged by different currents. If you don't require your electronic devices, consider leaving them at home. You will likely find that you don't use them as often as you expected – because you are too busy, or there are insufficient plugs, or your habits naturally shift as you adjust to the new culture.

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Packing

Now that you've planned for your trip, what do you need to bring? This will depend on the country you are visiting, the type of exchange you are participating in, and the length of time you plan to spend abroad. It will also depend on your personal needs and preferences. You most likely **will not** need to pack everything on this list – check the climate of your destination country before packing. Still, you can refer to the guidelines below for some suggestions of items you may need to bring.

Clothing –

- 2 weeks of underwear (it may be difficult to do laundry more frequently than this)
- 2 weeks of socks
- Undershirts/bras
- T-shirts/tank tops
- Long-sleeve shirts
- Sweaters/sweatshirts
- Warm jacket
- Rain jacket
- Jeans
- Sweatpants
- Work pants
- Shorts
- Skirts
- Nylons
- Belt
- Pajamas
- Bathing suit
- Hat
- Exercise clothes (and any sports equipment you will need for your sport of choice, such as cleats or a mouthguard)
- Nice outfit (for dinners out, etc.)
- Sandals
- Running shoes
- Dress shoes
- Walking shoes (expect more difficult walking surfaces in many countries, and consider leaving high heels behind)
- Rain/snow boots
- Scarves
- Gloves
- Shawl (in some countries, women will need to cover their shoulders to enter cathedrals and other religious buildings)
- Watch (especially if you do not plan to buy a phone)
- Jewelry
- Umbrella

***Note:** Keep in mind the cultural expectations of your destination country. While you should feel comfortable in whatever you choose to wear, some cultures may frown upon certain styles of dress, and some articles of clothing may even be forbidden.

Toiletries –

- Toiletries bag
- Soap
- Deodorant
- Shampoo/conditioner
- Toothbrush/toothpaste/dental floss
- Feminine hygiene products
- Hair brush
- Hair elastics
- Razors/shaving cream
- Tweezers
- Glasses case/cleaner
- Sunglasses
- Contact lenses/solution
- Nail file/clippers
- Makeup
- Lip balm
- Sunscreen
- Moisturizer/skin care products
- Band-Aids/blister pads (important if you expect to be walking a lot)
- Allergy medication
- Painkillers
- Birth control (enough for your entire stay)
- Other over-the-counter medications (Check the restrictions on over-the-counter medications in your destination country, as they may be different from Canada.)
- Prescription medications (enough for your entire stay)
- Vitamins/supplements
- Tissues/toilet paper (especially if you will be travelling by bus, train or car during your time abroad)
- Towel
- Face cloths

***Note:** Most toiletries will be available for purchase in your host country, so only bring enough for the first month or so (or if you have a preferred brand or sensitivities that may affect the ease of purchasing alternative products).

***Note:** Any liquids to be taken in carry-on luggage must meet airline requirements and fit in a 1 L Ziploc bag. If you are planning to go on short trips by plane during your time abroad, consider bringing travel-sized packages of things like shampoo and toothpaste.

School –

- Notebook
- Journal
- Dictionary

- Calendar/day planner
- Pencils/Pens/Erasers
- Highlighters
- Laptop if required

***Note:** Expectations for school supplies vary widely from country to country, so expect to purchase most of your school supplies upon arrival. In some countries (eg. Germany), it is difficult to purchase a day planner for the current year (they are available instead for the upcoming calendar year), so consider bringing your own.

Miscellaneous –

- Electronics (see above)
- Alarm clock
- Batteries
- USB key
- Headphones
- Chargers for all electronic devices
- Travel documents (see above)
- Money, cards and photocopies of cards (see above)
- Wallet/purse
- Money belt
- 2-3 books (you can trade or purchase new ones in your host country)
- Sleeping bag or sheets (only if required)
- Backpack
- Water bottle (empty for airport security)
- Reusable shopping bags
- Laundry bag
- Gifts for your hosts (something specific to your hometown or country)
- Playing cards
- Travel guide
- Sentimental items/photos (nothing you can't afford to lose)

Additional Packing Tips

Roll your clothing – To save space in your suitcase, roll your clothing tightly rather than folding.

Don't overpack – You can buy clothing and other items upon arrival – especially if you will be in your host country over several different seasons. Bring layers and items that can be used to create multiple different outfits. If you overpack, you may face overweight charges of several hundred dollars for your flights – each way! In many parts of the world, it is also less common to have large wardrobes, so don't feel self-conscious if you have less clothing than you are accustomed to. Bring clothing that can be machine-washed and hang-dried. Expect washing machines to be set to higher temperatures than in North America, which often results in colours running; take care to separate colours the first time you use the washing machines.

Bring things you can leave behind – You are likely to want to buy souvenirs, gifts and clothing while you are away. So bring clothing you can leave behind! Better yet, you can donate some of your used clothing to a local shelter or charity when you leave.

Bring gifts for your hosts – Especially if you are living with a host family, bring gifts for each member of the family (and consider bringing extras in case there are additional people who might expect them). Bring something symbolic of your country or hometown. Canadian memorabilia could include maple syrup or cookies, Canadian flags, memorabilia from the Vancouver Olympics or your favourite sports team, dream catchers, inukshuk figurines, etc.

Check customs regulations and airplane cabin regulations – Bring important documents, money and a change of clothes in your carry-on, but check prohibited or restricted items such as liquids, scissors and knives. Check the customs regulations for the country you are visiting to ensure that you do not import any illegal items. This is also important on your return trip – Canada prohibits the import of items such as unpasteurized cheese, large quantities of cigarettes or alcohol and many animal products. It can be very disappointing to have to discard a gift or souvenir when you return through Canadian Customs because it is prohibited for import.

What Not to Bring

What items should you wait to buy until you arrive in your destination country? This will depend on the details of your program, but, generally, most basic toiletries, medical supplies (other than prescription medication) and other essentials can be purchased abroad with little difficulty. Here are some examples of things you should not bring with you and why:

Hair dryers, etc. – Large, heavy items of this nature can be purchased abroad relatively cheaply and won't take up space in your luggage. They are also more likely to accept local electrical currents if purchased upon arrival. You may well choose to leave these items behind – perhaps with another international student. Similarly, sometimes you are fortunate enough to be the recipient of a departing student's accumulated products. "Pay it forward."

Alcohol and other prohibited goods – As mentioned above, check the restrictions for importing goods into your host country. Alcohol, cigarettes, weapons and many food items will create delays at Customs and Immigration and may be confiscated.

Large quantities of toiletries – Unless you are reliant on a particular brand, don't bring enough toiletries to last you from several months to a year or more abroad. This will take up valuable space in your luggage, and medications and other toiletries can usually be purchased abroad at relatively cheap prices.

Valuables – Especially when it comes to electronics, it is tempting to bring your most valuable items with you on international experiences. Remember that such items could be lost or stolen at many different points during your experience (especially if you are travelling within the host country or continent). If you must bring valuables with you, do not put them in your checked luggage, as this could easily be lost. Keep all money with you in the cabin, and separate it into multiple locations (eg. purse, backpack and money belt).

Other Great Resources for Travel Advice

If you have additional questions or want more information on preparing to study abroad, check out the following websites:

<http://www.uvic.ca/international/faculty-staff/home/funding-faculty-and-staff/funding-students-abroad/index.php> - UVic funding opportunities for studying abroad.

<http://travel.gc.ca> - A Canadian governmental website with information on travel, including advice, country-specific advisories, visa requirements and Customs and Immigration information.

www.studyabroad.com - A comprehensive resource targeted at American students studying abroad.

www.gooverseas.com - A website dedicated to studying, volunteering and working overseas.

<https://www.ricksteves.com> - Information for travelling in Europe.

<http://www.journeywoman.com> - Travel advice for women.

<http://www.bootsnall.com> - Indie travel guide with guides for LGBTQ travellers and travellers with disabilities.

Or go to <http://www.studentsabroad.com/handbook/resources.php?country=general> for a longer list of resources for studying abroad.