

How to Prepare For Your Overseas Experience

While it is possible to arrange an international educational experience in a shorter amount of time, ideally you should begin your planning and preparation 6-12 months in advance.

The following lists are designed to assist you in your preparations and get you ready for your international experience.



7-12 months before you leave:

Site Selection

- If you plan to design your own research or clinical experience**, refer to [GO Resources: General Resources for Overseas Study: *Identifying and Developing a Research Project Overseas*](#) and [Guidelines for International Volunteers](#).
- Prioritize the criteria you will use to choose the sites you will contact.** Is language most important? Would you be more interested in an urban versus a rural setting? Would you prefer a small clinic or a hospital? Do you have any health conditions to take into consideration in making your decision? How long would you like to be at the site? What skills do you have and what are you interested in learning? Refer to [GO Resources: General Resources for Overseas Study: *Check List: Site Selection*](#).
- Contact several sites to get more information about time frames, openings, and availability.** Decide on your top choice(s) and take the necessary steps to apply or secure a placement.

Language Preparation and Cultural Awareness

- Research the cultural contexts** of the different sites you are considering or talk to others who have traveled there to gain an understanding of what you might expect from your travels.
- Consider attending an in-country language school** before continuing on to your site. Refer to [GO Resources: Language Classes and Resources](#) for a listing of language schools and other language resources.

Health

- Talk with your health care provider** about your vaccination schedule and set up appointments. If you have any medical conditions or special considerations or if you have prescriptions that you will be taking or will need to get filled while you are away, discuss them with your health care provider. Many universities have travel clinics that can be helpful in meeting your medical needs before you leave. Make sure you obtain written documentation for any vaccinations you receive, as you will need to carry a copy of this while you are traveling. Refer to [GO Resources: Health and Safety: *Check List: Health*](#).
- Check with your insurance company** about which medical services will be covered while you are overseas. If you do not have health insurance or do not have comprehensive

coverage, refer to [GO Resources: Health and Safety](#) for information on international health insurance.

Financial

- ❑ **Estimate the cost of your trip and decide whether you will need financial assistance.** Be sure to factor in costs such as international airfare, passport and visa fees, and in-country living expenses.
- ❑ **Research funding options and apply.** Refer to [GO Resources: Financing](#).



4-6 months before you leave:

Travel Logistics

Refer to [GO Resources: Travel Logistics: Check List: Travel Logistics](#).

- ❑ **Contact your site** to confirm the details of your program. Some programs request that you only bring certain things with you, such as medical equipment. Check with them first. Also inquire whether or not you will need to bring mosquito netting and/or your own water sanitation equipment.
- ❑ **Consult with the [U.S. Department of State](#)** for your destination's Country Specific Information that includes Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts. You can also access this information by calling the Office of Overseas Citizen Services at 1-888-407-4747.
- ❑ **Renew or apply for your passport.** For application procedures and sites, visit the [U.S. Department of State](#) or call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778. Even if the country you will be visiting does not require you to have a passport, the U.S. requires a passport for reentry. If you already have a passport, check the expiration date; some countries will deny you access if your passport is scheduled to expire in less than six months.
- ❑ **Research [visa requirements](#)** at the U.S. Department of State by visiting the country's embassy or consulate or by contacting the [Federal Citizen Information Center](#).
- ❑ **Research your housing options.** Does the program provide housing or housing assistance, or do you need to make arrangements on your own? If you have to arrange your own housing, try [Hostelling International](#), university study abroad departments, and online travel sites to determine your options.

Language Preparation and Cultural Awareness

- ❑ **Research your destination through a variety of sources.** Check out [Lonely Planet](#) guides and other online travel sites and services. Refer to [GO Resources: Travel Logistics: Regional Information](#).
- ❑ **Investigate travel preparation courses** online or through your university. Being aware of cross-cultural issues, especially how different cultural perspectives and practices can

impact reproductive health, will prepare you for your travel and enhance your experience. Refer to [GO Resources: Cross-Cultural Preparation](#).

- ❑ **Consider taking language courses** or joining a language group to practice your language skills. Keep in mind it will be helpful to know medical words and phrases as well as conversational skills. Refer to [GO Resources: Language Classes and Resources](#).

Health

- ❑ **Visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Travelers' Health](#) website to**
 - ❑ **obtain information on vaccination recommendations and requirements** for the region you will be visiting and
 - ❑ **determine whether malaria prevention medications are recommended** for the area you will be traveling to and what precautions you will need to take.
- ❑ **Set up an appointment with your health care provider** or travel clinic to obtain the appropriate vaccinations, prescriptions, and malaria prevention medications necessary for your trip.

Financial

- ❑ **Budget** for all of your travel and living expenses.



1-3 months before you leave:

Travel Logistics

- ❑ **Book your airline ticket.** Try online student travel sites to find less expensive fares such as those listed in [GO Resources: Travel Logistics: Transportation and Accommodations](#). Also consider whether or not you are likely to travel before or after your program and take that into consideration when making your travel arrangements.
- ❑ **Choose someone to act as your emergency contact.** This person should have all contact information for you while you are away and details regarding your itinerary.
- ❑ **Make two copies of your passport, visa(s), an additional form of picture ID, and documentation of any vaccinations you have received.** Leave one copy at home with your emergency contact and take one set of copies with you, storing it away from the originals. If your passport and/or visa(s) are lost or stolen, having this additional identification will be necessary to obtain new documentation.
- ❑ **The U.S. Department of State encourages U.S. citizens to [register](#)** with them before traveling overseas.
- ❑ **Make arrangements for upcoming course registration and scholarship or financial aid renewal** while you are away. If you will be earning credit for your participation, make sure you know what documentation you will need in order to receive credit from your home institution.

- **Contact your site** to confirm your participation and to obtain details on traveling to your program location.
- **Decide how you will communicate with people back home.** Will you have Internet access? Is there an address where mail can be sent or forwarded to you? Consider buying a phone card before you leave to give you the option of calling home. Tell those who expect to hear from you that it may take you some time to contact them to let them know that you arrived safely and how often you anticipate being able to check in with them.
- **For suggestions on what to pack and what to leave behind,** check university study abroad sites for packing lists. The [International Medical Volunteers Association](#) has a helpful list. Research your destination's weather and local customs pertaining to dress. Refer to [GO Resources: Travel Logistics: Packing: Supplies and Equipment](#).
- **Make a list of emergency numbers to take with you,** including the numbers to the nearest embassy and/or consulate and any travel agents or airlines you will be using.

Language Preparation and Cultural Awareness

- **Consider purchasing a language dictionary.** There are a number of dictionaries written for healthcare professionals that will include medical terminology not typically found in most other dictionaries.
- **Bring a list of suggestions for how to manage culture shock.** Having a list on hand can be a good reminder for how to manage difficult situations.

Health

- **If you need to obtain malaria prevention medications,** you should allow at least 4-6 weeks to visit your health care provider and to fill your prescription. It is likely that you will need to begin taking this medication before you leave for your trip. For information on malaria symptoms, prevention, and types of malaria prevention medications, visit the CDC's Travelers' Health [Information for the Public: Prescription Drugs for Malaria](#).
- **Double-check that you are up to date on your vaccinations, pack extra prescriptions, contact lenses, and personal medical supplies, and have insurance in place in case of an emergency.** Review the CDC's Travelers Health [Travel Health Tips for Students Studying Abroad](#).

Financial

- **Check in with your funding sources.** How and when will the funding be dispersed? Will you have the funds before you leave or will you be reimbursed later?
- **Decide how you will manage your money.** Are there financial responsibilities that need to be taken care of while you are away? It may be a good idea to set up electronic payment options or charge someone you trust with taking care of your financial obligations while you are away.
- **At your site, will you have access to an ATM, will you carry traveler's checks, or will you need cash?** Even if you carry traveler's checks, it may be helpful to have at least a small amount of local currency when you first arrive. Most local banks can assist you with exchanging U.S. dollars. For information about currency conversion and locating international ATMs, refer to [GO Resources: Travel Logistics: Money](#).



Remember, with even the best laid plans, you are bound to encounter the unexpected. It is part of traveling. Try to stay calm and flexible, and have a great trip!