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Chapter 1: Contact Information

Office of International Education: (251) 460-7053

USA Police 24 Hour: (251) 460-6312

Contact information abroad:

EMBASSY AND CONSULATE

Look online at <http://www.travel.state.gov> to locate the closest U.S. Embassy/Consulate to your travel destination and check on issued travel alerts and warnings. You should regularly check for updates.

Important links:

U.S. GOVERNMENT LINKS

U.S. Department of State Students Abroad <http://studentsabroad.state.gov>

U.S. Customs and Border Protections Agency <http://cbp.gov>

Travel Registration <https://travelregistration.state.gov>

Center for Disease Control (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov>

Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) <http://www.osac.gov>

Transportation Security Administration <http://www.tsa.gov>

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT) <http://www.asirt.org>

Lonely Planet <http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

Travelers Digest <http://www.travelersdigest.com>

The Bathroom Diaries <http://www.thebathroomdiaries.com>

EXCHANGE RATE CONVERTERS

Onada <http://www.onada.com>

Universal Currency Converter <http://xe.com>

Chapter 2: Policies

USA STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

Key points of conduct that you should be aware of:

- Off campus illegal activities, including possession of a false identification is a violation of USA policies.
- You may not engage in sexual activity with another person without their verbal consent and/or action that explicitly implies their consent.

* If the University is made aware of any misconduct, severe consequences and dismissal from the program may occur.

THE FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 is a federal law that protects the privacy and confidentiality of information contained within a student's educational records. The University of South Alabama is in compliance with FERPA's confidentiality protections. This means that without your consent we will not release any information from your educational record that would be in violation of this law.

Chapter 3: Emergency Plan

While most who study abroad have a safe and healthy experience, some students may encounter minor crises such as pick-pocketing, petty theft, or minor illness, or injury. In an unfamiliar environment with communication and cultural barriers, a minor crisis may be more difficult to handle. Similar to the realities existing on a U.S. campus, there may be a few students who encounter a major emergency while abroad, such as a serious illness or injury, traffic accident, natural disaster, or violent crime.

In case of emergency situations, students abroad should adapt an Emergency Action Plan.

7-STEP EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

STEP ONE: ***Remain calm.*** Take a deep breath. You will need a clear head in order to focus on your next move.

STEP TWO: ***Assess the situation/get advice from program staff.*** Identify the type of emergency situation. Contact program staff for advice.

STEP THREE: ***Take action.*** Exercise good judgment. Follow your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) and get to a safe location where you can get help.

STEP FOUR: ***Get in touch.*** Update others about your situation. Contact your emergency contacts, CISI, and your Study Abroad Advisor.

STEP FIVE: ***Move to a more permanent location.*** Consider transportation options and go to a safe location (your place of residence, university, hospital, police station, embassy/consulate, emergency contact's home, counseling center, etc.)

STEP SIX: ***Stay in touch.*** Maintain contact and update your emergency contacts on your condition.

STEP SEVEN: ***Evaluate and revise your EAP.*** After the emergency is over, and once your condition has stabilized, evaluate your EAP and use what you've learned to revise it in case of future emergencies.

Chapter 4: Finances

Currency – You know, of course, your host country does not use U.S. dollars. Research the currency used and the exchange rate. Rates change continually so check them regularly. Onada (<http://www.onada.com>) and the Universal Currency Converter (<http://xe.com>) are commonly used Web sites. Keep exchange rates and cost differences in mind when making purchases. For example, a coke in the U.K. may be £2.00. In U.S. dollars, this would be around \$3.20. Exchanging some U.S. money for local currency before arrival (enough for a phone call and taxi) is wise. Currency exchange can be done at major banks or in most international airports and train stations.

Budgeting – Develop a weekly budget for your time abroad. Check websites and read travel books to become familiar with things you want to do while in country. Look for special student rates and discounts. To better estimate what your personal costs will be, talk with people who have been in the country before, are there now, or who have done the program before. Be realistic and keep in mind that currencies may vary drastically between the time you make your plans and actual arrival date.

Money and Banking – Credit or debit cards are an excellent method of payment while overseas. If you plan on using them while abroad, let your bank and/or credit card company know your travel dates and the countries you will be visiting. If not, the card may be cut off or cancelled. Pre-paid credit cards are also a good option. Also consider withdrawing from your bank about \$100 in local currency before leaving the U.S. in case money cannot be exchanged right away or an ATM cannot be found.

Credit Cards are widely accepted in most countries and are necessary in an emergency. Credit cards are convenient, reduce the amount of cash you need to carry, and generally give a fair exchange rate.

ATM Cards and Debit Cards are convenient abroad to obtain local currency. Find out from your bank your international PIN for overseas transactions (some are 4 digits, some 6). Also, ask if your card is connected to a world-wide system (like Cirrus or Plus), if fees are charged for using a foreign ATM, and your daily withdrawal limit (some banks will raise it if you ask).

Wiring Money – Funds may be wired to you from the U.S. through any U.S. bank that has a corresponding bank in the city where you are staying. Funds are typically received within 2 to 10 business days from the time the wire is processed. Wiring fees are generally paid on the U.S. side, but occasionally on both. This can be expensive, so plan accordingly. Western Union may be a more affordable option.

Chapter 5: Travel Documents

A ***passport*** is a document from your home country that confirms your citizenship.

A ***visa*** is a document provided by the government of the country to which you will be traveling that confirms your legitimate status as a foreign visitor.

You will need a current passport that is valid for a minimum of six months after the time you are scheduled to return home. It is necessary to obtain a passport before applying for a visa. Some visas are free and easy to acquire, while others may have a significant cost and require documentation. Check with the U.S. State Department or your host country's embassy or consulate to determine if a visa is needed and for information on how to apply.

Being granted a visa by a foreign government should not be taken lightly. There are regulations for being in a country with or without a visa. You must know what is expected of you as a student or visitor of the host country and abide by the visa regulations in order to maintain legal status.

Chapter 6: Health and Safety Matters

Consider your mental and physical health issues when applying for a study abroad program. Provide the necessary information to the program's administrators so they can assist you with any special needs and advise you on the risks you might face. Study abroad can present both physical and mental challenges for students.

It is important that you are familiar with the health care system of the country where you will be studying, including the quality of facilities and the cost of services. Locate the nearest hospital to where you are staying and know how to file a claim for your insurance policy on both your private health insurance and international insurance.

MEDICAL CONCERNS

Availability of Medical Care – The availability of medical care will vary from country to country. In some countries it will seem similar to the care in the U.S. In others, finding an English-speaking doctor or medical facility might be difficult. It is important to research these conditions before travelling outside the parameters of your program.

Medical History – Have a checkup to know your current medical conditions. Your doctor or nurse can also advise you on what special precautions to take based on your medical history and your host country. You may need to go to a special travel health clinic to get clear advice on medical care abroad and what vaccinations and medications for vaccine-preventable diseases and other diseases you might be at risk for at your destination.

Special Accommodations – If you need any special accommodations, regulations for accessibility may not be as updated in other countries as they are in the U.S. Check to determine if accommodations like wheelchair ramps are provided in all modes of transportation, and to determine if the housing facilities are equipped to serve people with special needs.

Infectious Diseases and Inoculations – Research infectious diseases common in countries in which you will be traveling. Get the appropriate shots and pills, and bring the appropriate medications with you if your doctor thinks it is necessary. Know about any potential side effects of shots and pills you take. For more information on diseases prevalent in your destination country, please see the CDC website: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>.

Medications – If you regularly take any over the counter medications such as Aleve, antacids, Tylenol, sleeping aids, multivitamins, supplements, etc., be sure to find out how you will get these while abroad. If they are not available and you plan on taking a supply with you, check with your host country's consulate to see if there are any laws against having these over the counter medications in large quantities. It is useful to get a prescription from your doctor verifying why you take them.

Prescriptions – Check with your host country's consulate to see which prescriptions are legal. If you want OIE's help to determine if and in what quantity you may take your prescription into your host country, you will need to disclose what prescriptions you are currently taking. Get a doctor's signed prescription for any medication you have to take abroad. Some prescriptions may need to be translated if you wish to fill them abroad. Bring your glasses or contact lens prescription, as well. Take an extra pair of glasses if possible.

First-Aid Kit - Consider bringing a well-stocked first-aid kit as a first line of defense. Some items to consider including are bandages, a flashlight, batteries, sterile pads, insect repellent, adhesive tape, aspirin, antacid, anti-diarrhea tablets, anti-malarial medication, extra bottled water, rubber gloves, etc.

WATER AND FOOD

Potable Water – Find out if water is safe to drink in the countries where you will be traveling. Purify unsafe water before drinking. Make sure water bottles come sealed when purchased. Remember that ice can also be unsafe, as well as the water from the kitchen or bathroom sink.

Food Safety – Poor refrigeration, undercooked meat, and roadside/outdoor vendors could pose problems related to food contamination. If you get diarrhea or food poisoning, drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. As with any illness, consider seeing a doctor if your condition worsens. This is your opportunity to be adventurous and try new foods, but give your body time to adjust.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Alcohol and Drugs – The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad can increase the risk of accident and injury. Violating drug laws abroad may result in very serious consequences including imprisonment or even death.

TRAVEL SAFETY

Precautions When Accepting Food and Drink – Use more caution abroad than you would in the United States when it comes to accepting a drink (alcoholic or non-alcoholic) from a stranger. Also be cautious about accepting food from a stranger.

Verbal and Non-verbal Communication – Non-verbal communication (like body language or hand gestures) considered harmless in the U.S. may be offensive to people in other countries. The list of gestures and phrases considered rude in other countries can grow beyond the obvious.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases – Keep free from STDs by using protection (like condoms or abstinence). Also, remember that “no” may not always be interpreted as “no” in other countries. Inform yourself about the common types of STDs prevalent in the area in which you are traveling.

You are American – Whether you know it or not, you display inherent American tendencies. It does not matter if you were born and raised here or if you just recently moved here. We are all members of American society and as such, certain behaviors and mannerisms we naturally exhibit can call attention to our Americanisms. While abroad, you may immediately be identified as an American – not by gender, race, or religion – but by association with American society.

Setting an Example – Remember you are an ambassador, not only for USA, but also for Alabama and America. Behave in a way that is respectful of others’ rights and well-being. Encourage others around you to do the same.

Risk On Arrival – Travelers, especially those who have just arrived, are often targets of crime and are at higher risk of harm. This is because they are:

- Unfamiliar with their surroundings
- Probably not fluent in the local language
- Clearly recognizable as foreigners
- Not yet accustomed to the social norms or unwritten rules of conduct
- Eager to get to know new people and the local culture
- Naive to the intentions of people around them
- Carrying all their valuables when they first step off the plane, train, or boat

Keep Control – The circumstances associated with being new in a foreign country are often beyond one’s immediate control. However, there are many situations that can be controlled. Some controllable factors to avoid include:

- Being alone at night in an isolated area
- Being in a known high crime area
- Sleeping in an unlocked place
- Being out after a local curfew
- Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs

Travel Alerts are issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions, either transnational or within a particular country, that pose significant risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Some examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert are natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high-profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events.

Travel Warnings are issued when long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable lead the State Department to recommend that Americans avoid or consider the risk of travel to that country. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure or staff drawdown of an embassy or consulate.

Resources for Safe Travel – Many websites are useful resources when researching travel safety. Anyone can check Travel Alerts and Travel Warnings issued by the U.S. Department of State by going online to <http://travel.state.gov>. Also, YouTube’s “statevideo” channel features official videos produced by the U.S. Department of State: <http://www.youtube.com/user/statevideo>

LOCAL CURRENT EVENTS

International Sources of Information – Inform yourself as much as possible about your new environment, making use of as many different sources as possible (online, libraries, television, radio programs, newspapers, etc.) Don't limit yourself to U.S. sources. Instead, collect information from other countries to contrast with information provided by the U.S.

Political Rallies – Avoid political rallies, which can increase tensions, raise emotions, or breed angry mobs for which a U.S. citizen may serve as a scapegoat.

Political Conversations – Expect to hear criticism of the United States. If you educate yourself on U.S. politics and foreign policies, you will be more prepared to handle these discussions as they occur. Criticism of U.S. policies is not typically meant as a personal attack. Most foreign nationals are very interested in the U.S. and will want to know your opinions about our political system.

Try not to engage in conversations about contentious local political issues and avoid retaliating against hostile or bigoted remarks about Americans. It is best to stay away from elections in general, as they can be dangerous and the crowds can rapidly escalate into an angry mob. Reading local newspapers will give you an opportunity to develop a further understanding of your host culture, pick up more of the language, and keep updated on what's going on locally.

Sporting events – Sporting events can turn riotous quickly and be an unsafe place. Avoid crowds and celebrate in a controlled environment.

Chapter 7: Travel Information

Packing – Most travelers pack too much. A little bit of research will go a long way. Look up weather conditions and seasons for your host country/location and plan ahead. Pack items that can be mixed and matched to maximize your wardrobe. Toiletries can be purchased abroad, so you don't have to pack enough to last the entire stay. Utilize laundry facilities if available.

Practice lifting your bag and carrying it yourself. If you cannot carry your bags around the block three times by yourself, you have over packed.

Invest in good footwear. Do not bring new and unworn shoes, no matter how fashionable they are. You do not want aching, blistered feet. Be practical when deciding which jewelry to take with you. Don't take flashy, expensive, or irreplaceable items of sentimental value overseas.

Packing a few personal items in your carry-on can make your trip more comfortable. Good ideas are: medication, your passport, a toothbrush, a change of clothes, and undergarments in case of flight delay/cancellation or lost/delayed luggage. (See the "Helpful Packing Guide" in Chapter 11 for recommended items).

Consider taking a small token of appreciation for your on-site director, host university coordinator, or host family.

TSA – Check the Transportation Security Administration website (<http://www.tsa.gov>) prior to your departure to find out what items are allowed in your carry-on bags. Pay close attention to the 3-1-1 rule for liquids. When in doubt, pack liquids in your checked luggage.

TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL

Studying abroad gives you many opportunities to travel. Your program should have sufficient study breaks to enable you to visit neighboring countries or travel within your host country. It is important to know what the safest modes of transportation are in order to avoid accidents while traveling.

Public – We encourage you to use public transportation including buses and metros to help familiarize yourself with your host country. Additionally, it is often the most convenient and affordable option. You should be able to find navigation information in travel books or online. Be wary of pickpockets and use safety precautions when traveling. If possible, do not travel alone, at night, or on unsafe highways.

International Rail – If you plan to travel to neighboring countries, traveling by international rail is often convenient and affordable. You can reserve your seat online before purchasing your ticket. Trains travel directly between city centers and are sometimes faster than flights with layovers. Traveling by train is usually much faster than by bus and can be a better option if you want to see more places in a short amount of time. You should avoid traveling alone at night, particularly in more urban areas. Take advantage of special promotions and rates for students when available.

Flying – If you are traveling between countries or distant cities (i.e., London and Rome), consider air travel. Flying can save time, especially if you only have a long weekend to complete your trip. There are several reliable and inexpensive airlines and travel sites to choose from such as Student Universe (www.studentuniverse.com), Ryanair (www.ryanair.com/en), Air Italy (www.airitaly.com), and many others.

Walking – Get a pair of comfortable walking shoes. Without access to a car or public transportation abroad, you may have to do quite a bit of walking. Break in your shoes before you go to avoid blisters.

Bus – Buses may be the cheapest way to travel and are often a very popular choice. They can take you to short distance destinations and even to nearby train stations. If you can't find service to a particular location on national or regional bus lines, local service should be able to take you to your desired destination.

Metro – In major cities especially, you will find the metro system to be the most convenient form of transportation to move about the city. Always beware of your surroundings and watch out for pickpockets. Never put your bag or purse under the seat.

Cars/Driving – Renting a car can be a great way to see the countryside, but can also be stressful and sometimes dangerous. Many countries have driving laws significantly different than the U.S. (such as the UK or Hong Kong where drivers travel on the left side of the road). Insurance is often a requirement and may function under a different system than that to which you are accustomed. Obtain full coverage insurance when renting vehicles in any country. If a driver is involved in a vehicle accident resulting in damages or injuries to another party, local authorities may detain the driver until a settlement is arranged with the injured party. Also, depending upon the extent of damages or injuries to the other party, you may face charges resulting in heavy fines or even jail time.

Chapter 8: Communication

Internet Access – Email is by far the cheapest form of communication. Having a laptop or smart phone makes email quite easy with free Wi-Fi available in many public places. Having a computer also makes class assignments and uploading photos more convenient. The AC adapter of most laptops is dual voltage and can be used anywhere in the world with a plug adaptor.

Laptops and access to social networking sites may not be allowed in some countries. Failure to research this difference could lead to confiscation of your laptop or even deportation. If you do not take a computer, most universities have computer labs. Internet cafes are also common and cheap in many large cities. In some areas, Internet access may not be readily available and connection speeds may be different. Unless you find an Internet café or use the host university's computer lab, do not expect Internet to be immediately accessible upon your arrival. It may take a few days to establish your account with an Internet provider.

Cellphones and Calling Cards – Cellphones have become more common and less expensive all around the world. Although local calls may be inexpensive, international calls often have a high cost. Texting may be a less expensive way to communicate internationally. Some multi-band phones used in the United States can also be used while abroad. You can also purchase your own cell phone in your host country. A cellphone may also be included in your program fee. The most reasonable way to communicate by phone between the country where you will be studying and the United States may be by purchasing an international calling card, available through various companies or providers.

Skype (<http://www.skype.com>) is both a fun and cost efficient form of communication. Skype is a program you can download to make phone calls from your computer to another Skype user. For a small fee you can also make calls to any landline or cell phone in the world using this program.

Blogging and Pictures – Blogging is an excellent way to keep everyone updated on your adventure as well as an easy way to keep a journal of your experiences. If you're interested and meet the criteria, you may be able to have your blog featured on the study abroad website.

Take pictures of everything. You can look back at them to remember your time abroad and also enter photo contest competitions once you return to USA.

Chapter 9: Social and Cultural Considerations

BEHAVIOR / CONDUCT

Diplomat – We cannot stress enough that you are **at all times** a representative of the United States, the University of South Alabama, and your family. Everything you do will be seen through the eyes of those stereotyping who you are and where you come from. It is important to remember that some people in your host country may have never met an American. You may be the one person on whom they base their opinion of all Americans.

Stereotypes – A stereotype is a preconception, usually over-simplified, of a person or group. They may be based on generalizations from limited personal experiences or from images presented through the media. People may base their expectations, feelings, and behaviors with others on these simplifications rather than their personal experience. Hence, stereotypes are linked to travel safety.

Stereotypes can present Americans as “outgoing, friendly, informal, loud, hard-working, extravagant, wealthy, wasteful, confident, egocentric, ethnocentric, ignorant, disrespectful of authority, always in a hurry, generous, immature, rude, promiscuous, and politically naïve” (Crossing Cultures 2008). These stereotypes will mediate your relationships. Your awareness of them may facilitate your communication and relationships during your program.

Learning about stereotypes may also help you become more mindful about how your behavior may reinforce or develop stereotypes. While abroad, you have the chance to correct negative stereotypes and reinforce positive ones others may have about the United States, USA, and your community.

DIVERSITY IN STUDY ABROAD

Relationships – Different cultures have different norms in regard to gender. Women and men should both be aware that the ways people interact vary widely by region and country. Issues centered on dating and sexuality can be particularly difficult in a cross-cultural setting. Interactions, such as eye contact, clothing choices, and body language, can send very different messages depending on your host country. Observing interpersonal interactions within a culture can be useful in helping you choose the way in which you communicate verbally and non-verbally with others in that country.

Cultural differences may make male-female friendships more challenging. Consider the implicit messages you are communicating, even if they are not the messages you believe you're conveying in your own cultural context. Above all, try to maintain the perspective that these challenging and sometimes difficult experiences are part of your growth in cultural understanding, which is one of the most important reasons you are studying abroad.

Meeting new, exciting, and different people may encourage actions that you would not have performed under similar circumstances at home. Don't be foolish in assuming that you are invulnerable because you are a visitor in the country.

Before choosing to be sexually active, ask yourself why you are making this choice. Be aware of and clearly set your boundaries and partner expectations. Don't leave the country with anything you didn't bring: this includes a pregnancy or any sexually transmitted diseases.

Female Travelers – In certain locations and programs, women may have a difficult time adjusting to attitudes they encounter abroad, both in public and private interactions between men and women. It is not uncommon to be honked at, stared at, verbally and loudly approved of, and in general, to be actively noticed in ways that many American women may find offensive, simply for being a woman. Local women who often get the same sort of treatment have learned through their culture how to respond to the attention.

Uncomfortable situations may not always be preventable, but consider taking the following precautions:

- Dress conservatively; while short skirts and tank tops may be comfortable, they may encourage unwanted attention.
- Avoid walking alone late at night or in questionable neighborhoods.
- Do not agree to meet a person whom you do not know well in a non-public place.
- Be aware that some men from other cultures tend to mistake the friendliness of U.S. American women for romantic interest.

It is ok to be frustrated or angered while adjusting to a new culture. You most likely will not purposefully do anything to attract unwanted attention; if you become uncomfortable, the best way to deal with it is to follow the example of local women and mimic their responses.

Race and Ethnicity – As a multicultural student, you may be concerned about facing potential racial biases and prejudices without the comfort of your usual support system. On the other hand, you may be looking forward to being part of the majority population. You may be planning a self-discovery sojourn to the country or region of your family's heritage. Whatever reasons you have for studying abroad, you will find adjusting abroad can be a positive growth experience. It can present a unique learning opportunity that will serve you well in the future.

Political and Religious Views – Political turmoil or lack of tolerance in many countries can make some ethnic and religious groups a target for mistreatment or even violence. Political rallies and certain dates (anniversaries of historic events) often spur ethnic and religious conflicts. Certain hate crimes may not even be considered crimes in your host country.

With regard to religion, the risk or censure you attract will depend on your level of religious involvement abroad. If others have been attacked in your host country for practicing the religion you practice, any signs of your religious affiliation may put you at risk as well.

Sexual Orientation – Preparing for what to expect in a particular country can make the difference between a wonderful experience abroad and an unpleasant one. Before you go, learn the laws pertaining to homosexuality in the countries you plan to visit. Reflect on the culturally based ideas and definitions of sexual identity and consider carefully how your identity as a LGBTQ person may affect your relationships with host nationals, your cultural adjustment, and your overall education abroad experience.

In some other areas of the world, expressions of friendship (such as eye contact, a smile, touching, and physical proximity) may be quite different than those expressed among U.S. peers. This could cause you to experience confusion or uncertainty about who may or may not be LGBTQ. For example, in several Middle Eastern countries hand-holding among males is a custom of special friendship and respect.

Students with Disabilities – Disclosing your special needs in advance will be key to your success abroad. Contact the host institution or your program provider to find out what accommodations are available.

Discrimination – If you believe you are being discriminated against, please discuss it with the resident director, faculty leader, or on-site staff. Discrimination is built on negative stereotypes and prejudices that are influenced by a variety of factors, including the media. Although these attitudes may be frustrating at times, remember that one of the main reasons for your participation in study abroad is to learn about other cultures. This includes both the positive and negative aspects. What you perceive as a discriminatory act or remark may not necessarily be one in the context of the host culture, but rather a cultural difference.

MODERN CONVENIENCES

Electricity – Electrical systems are different around the world. In some countries you will need a converter to use U.S. sold appliances due to voltage and outlet differences. However, even with an adapter U.S. appliances still might not work properly. A converter/adaptor kit can be purchased so that you can still use your U.S. appliances, but know that some U.S. appliances use different voltage and some outlets may not be able to accommodate your device.

Plumbing – The idea of a western toilet with a porcelain bowl and a seat is not universal. You may find things are different even in British bathrooms (or the “loo”). Bathroom facilities abroad can literally be holes in the floor, outhouses, the local river, or non-existent. Bidets are common, especially in Europe. Toilet paper is often not available, not commonly used, or something you must purchase even in public restrooms. You may want to carry a pocket pack of tissues with you just in case.

Sinks and running water to wash your face and hands or brush your teeth may not always be an option. If sink water is an option, be sure to ask if you can drink it or brush your teeth with it. If not, you may need to use bottled water. Showers may also be different, as some cultures prefer to bathe in a tub or another water source instead, like a river or the ocean. Handheld water sprayers may replace U.S. style fixed showerheads.

Facilities – Facilities may be modern or rundown, working or out of order, clean or dirty. Basically, you take what you get and deal with it. In many cases, especially in poorer areas of a country, you may have to change your expectations a bit and accept what's available. Facilities do not have to be new to be safe.

EXPECTATIONS VS. EXPERIENCE

Adjustments – Living abroad will be a different experience. Anticipating some of the differences ahead of time can help better prepare for life abroad. An important thing to remember is to be flexible. You will have to adapt to new things you encounter. Accept that many things will be different from home. *Learn to expect the unexpected!*

Routines and Schedules – While abroad, your routine will change. There will most likely be a time difference and your city may adhere to a different schedule than you're used to. From late night dinners to shops closings early, each city is different, so plan your routine around these changes. You might also need to plan class or excursions around bus/metro arrival time, as well as your roommates' or host family's unique schedules. There are countless ways in which your routine abroad can differ from your routine at home. While it may be frustrating at first, be flexible and always look for ways to adapt and get the most out of your experience.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

New Surroundings – Studying abroad is an invaluable experience providing an opportunity to live in a foreign country, learn its customs and culture, and adapt to new surroundings. The success of your experience depends upon your own efforts to acclimate yourself to living and studying in a foreign culture. **You will have moments of exhilaration and moments of real frustration.** Gradually, as you come to terms with the culture, the frustrations will become fewer and fewer.

Culture Shock - You may experience some discomfort before you are able to settle in to your new surroundings. From food, hygiene, weather, language, dress, or even political and social norms, *culture shock can be shocking*. It is important to remember that adapting one's behavior to the customs and expectations of the host country is your responsibility as a visitor and guest. This is not to deny one's own culture but to respect that of others. Remaining open and flexible rather than judgmental is the key. This can be the most rewarding experience in your education.

The process of mentally, physically, and emotionally adjusting to a new environment is commonly known as "culture shock." It is a response to being in a situation where everything is different from your previous experiences, including language/slang, food, transportation, body language, and everyday activities. Culture shock covers a wide range of reactions from mild annoyance to frustration, depression, fatigue, and excitement.

The Glimpse Foundation (<http://glimpse.org>) has published several guides based on extensive survey research with study abroad returnees. Here is their description of culture shock and its phases: "*...Culture shock manifests itself differently in different people, but research has detected general patterns of emotional highs and lows experienced by international travelers. These phases vary in duration and severity, and are not necessarily linear.*"

Euphoria- The first few hours, days, or weeks abroad are often characterized by the excitement of sensory overload. Both adrenaline and expectations are running high, and everything seems new and intriguing.

Irritability and Hostility- Once the initial "honeymoon" phase subsides, dissonances between home and host cultures begin to seem more pronounced. This can cause a sense of alienation to set in. Curiosity and enthusiasm can about-face, transforming into frustration, insecurity, negativity toward local culture, glorification of home culture, exaggerated responses to minor problems, withdrawal, and/or depression.

Gradual Adjustment- With time, you'll begin to orient yourself to a different set of cultural practices and feel increasingly comfortable and confident in your new surroundings. Your sense of humor will reemerge.

Re-entry or Reverse Culture Shock- Upon returning home, you will be faced with integrating your abroad experience with life in the United States. You might feel disoriented, out of place, or changed by your experience in a way that makes relating to family and friends difficult.

Dealing with Culture Shock –

- Research! Read about the cultural differences before your departure so you can better understand the culture.
- Try to look for logical reasons why things happen. This may help you view your host culture in a more positive light.
- Be slow to judge; observe first, show respect, and invite conversation. Try not to dwell on the negative things about your host culture and don't hang around people who do.
- Explore! Get a sense of the physical environment: look for parks, sports facilities, bus stops, etc. Get a sense of the behavioral norms: how do locals greet each other, wait in line, etc. Find out where people meet and socialize. Make an effort to go to those places.
- Try to fit into a rhythm in your host culture. Adjust to the locals' time schedule for meals and work. Read local newspapers and books.
- Keep your sense of humor!
- Set small goals for yourself, as high expectations may be difficult to meet.
- Speak the language of the country you are in and don't worry if you only know a few phrases.
- Take care of yourself by exercising, getting enough sleep, eating properly, and doing things you enjoy.
- Keep in touch with friends and family at home.
- Draw on your personal resources for handling stress. You've done it many times before, and you can do it again.

PREPARING TO RETURN HOME

Packing – You will return home with more than you initially brought. Packing lightly and efficiently is important in the beginning and will become even more so as your trip ends. Consider shipping your souvenirs and purchases home. This can sometimes be cheaper and less of a hassle than having extra bags on the plane.

Souvenirs – Buying local goods and souvenirs is an excellent way to remember your time abroad. Shopping in a new country can be fun but always keep in mind the logistics of taking souvenirs home. Be mindful of the size of your luggage and the amount of extra space. Also keep in mind what is acceptable to bring back to the United States.

Customs – Customs control regulations may affect what you can and cannot bring in and out of your host country. Following the events of September 11, 2001, U.S. airport and customs security have become much stricter, leading to longer waits prior to boarding planes, body searches, and questions from officials in both countries. Remember to be patient, honest, and polite when answering all officials' questions. For complete information on border issues, please visit the U.S. Customs and Border Protections Agency website: <http://cbp.gov>.

Chapter 10: Upon Return

Congratulations on completing your study abroad experience! But never fear, your journey is far from over!

Adding an international component to your education is a wonderful accomplishment. However, what you do with the experience is just as important as what you learned while abroad. We look forward to hearing from you as you get involved in the many activities available to you as a new international ambassador. Below is useful advice and opportunities for tapping into your new world perspective and sharing it with others.

RE-ENTRY AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Similar to the cultural adjustment pattern you experienced when arriving in a foreign country, you may also experience stages of cultural adjustment when returning home.

Euphoria (Honeymoon Phase) – The first few hours, days, or weeks back home are often characterized by the excitement of sensory overload. Both adrenaline and expectations are running high.

Irritability and Hostility – Once the initial "honeymoon" phase subsides, you may feel anger, depression, or boredom with being home. You may feel some or all of the following symptoms: a sense of no longer belonging to your home culture, frustration of adjusting to a different pace of life in America, a sense that friends, family, or colleagues are not interested in discussing your experience, friends made abroad are missed as well as the culture and way of life in the host country.

Gradual Adjustment – With time, you'll begin to feel more comfortable in your home country. You may fall into some of your old routines, but you will be different than when you first left. The key is to find a way to positively blend your old life with the new life you created abroad.

Preparing for Re-entry – There are ways to prepare for re-entry before returning home. While away, keep up on what's going on with friends and family and try to keep track of local and national news so you do not feel totally lost when you get back home.

Recognize that you will develop at a personal level. People at home are growing and changing, too. Think about what you want to do when you get back and try to have a plan for your return. Resist the tendency to think that your friends and family have not done anything while you were away. Plan your finances for your return: How will you pay for school, rent, gas, and food? Do you need to apply for student loans or other financial support?

It may take some time to feel at home again. Use patience to ease the transition.

- Keep your cultural sensitivity. Observe American culture the same way you observed foreign culture. Consider what you like about America and what you want to keep from the culture you experienced abroad.
- Stay positive and active. There will be frustrations and disappointments but work through it with the same enthusiasm that you brought to your overseas experience.
- Friends and family may have a difficult time understanding your readjustment difficulties. Try to explain that it is a normal phase in any traveler's journey.

SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCE

You are now in a unique position to further enrich your own life as well as the lives of others by sharing experiences and how they have affected your understanding of yourself, your country, and the rest of the world. You are now a part of the distinctive number of students who have studied abroad.

When you return, make the most of what you learned from your travels. Take time to reflect, and then turn your reflections into action:

- Become a **Conversation Partner!** This is where international students meet with USA students for informal conversation about cultural topics.
- Join **student organizations**.
- Write an article for the **Vanguard**.
- Become an **International Education Ambassador!** This internship opportunity is an excellent way to share your experience and encourage other students to study abroad.
- If you will not be returning to university, engage in a meaningful activity (volunteer at a hospital or school). Sitting at home while friends and family are busy with their everyday lives will not help your readjustment.

Chapter 11: Helpful Packing Guide

Packing requires planning and careful consideration. Below is a general list of suggested items you may consider packing.

Carry-on

- Passport and any necessary visas
- Entry letter from host institution or provider
- Airline ticket(s)
- U.S. and foreign currency
- Copies of important documents and emergency contact information
- Credit and debit cards
- State driver's license
- International Driving Permit
- International Calling Card
- Eyeglasses and/or contact lenses
- Prescription medication in its original container, a back-up supply, and a letter from your doctor
- Instructions for treating any allergies or unique medical conditions
- Camera and charger/batteries
- Laptop and other small electronic devices
- Cell phone and charger
- Extra change of clothing and undergarments
- Books and/or magazines

Checked Luggage

- Extra copies of important documents and emergency contact information
- Seasonally and culturally appropriate clothing, undergarments, bathing suit, shoes, and accessories
- Toiletries
- First aid kit*
- Sewing kit*
- Eyeglass repair kit*
- Nail clippers*
- Electric or manual razor for shaving*
- Over-the-counter pain relievers
- Extra laptop battery, disks, and/or flash drive
- Small umbrella
- Extra sweater and scarf to cover arms, hair, or legs for certain holy sites
- Travel alarm clock
- Small purse or pouch
- Converter or transformer for 110- volt electrical devices
- Plug adapter
- Small flashlight

*May get confiscated if placed in carry-on baggage for security purposes. Check with <http://www.tsa.gov> for updates on restricted items.

Additional Notes: