

Global Education Office

TRAVELER CHECKLIST

Preparing for a trip abroad, whether you are first-time traveler or a seasoned globe-trotter, can be daunting. Your GEO advisors have created the following checklist to help you kickstart the process and transition from feeling nervous to feeling excited about your study abroad experience! If you have questions about any of the below, don't hesitate to reach out to your GEO advisor.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

- Apply for a passport.** Your first [U.S. passport](#) must be applied for in person, and may take up to 6 weeks to receive. It's a good idea to do this as soon as you start considering study abroad! The nearest location to Vanderbilt where you may make your personal appearance is the post office in [Hillsboro Village](#).
- Sign** your passport once it is received. Your passport is only valid when signed.
- You may need a **visa** to enter your host country(s). You will need a valid passport in order to apply for a visa, so be sure to get that done well in advance.
- Some countries require you to appear **in person** for a visa application, others may not require a visa for U.S. passport holders at all. Do your research. Trivisa.com is a great place to begin. Your study abroad program may also provide detailed information about the visa.
- If a visa is required, research the requirements based on your nationality. How early can you get started? How long does it take before a visa can be granted? Can you apply online or in-person? Which consulate handles your visa application? Do they take appointments or walk-ins? Can you utilize honorary consul service? What documents do you need? Be thorough.
- While you should only apply for a visa **after** acceptance into a program, you should preemptively gather supporting documents and materials needed for the visa application while you wait to hear back from your program. If you will need to make an appearance at a consulate, make the appointment early--you can always cancel if you end up not needing the visa.
- DO NOT** plan any international travel during the time of visa application - your passport may need to be surrendered to the embassy along with your visa application. If this is an unavoidable concern, please reach out to your GEO advisor right away.

PRE-DEPARTURE

Finances

- Research the international allowances of your debit/credit card. Is there a **foreign transaction fee**? Is it more cost-effective/convenient/safe to use a credit card, to carry cash, or to open an account abroad?
- You will likely need at least some cash during the time you're abroad. Be sure to use a debit card for ATM withdrawals. It is not cost-effective to use a credit card at an ATM.

- Consider applying for a new credit or debit card that's good for travel (i.e., cards with travel benefits and no foreign transaction fee).
- **Inform your card company** of your travels to avoid account freezes. You can do this online, via phone, or in person.

Health

- See a doctor or other clinician for applicable vaccinations and prescription refills prior to traveling. You can make an appointment with [Student Health](#) or your home healthcare provider.
- Work with your doctor to set up continuing care abroad if needed, whether that is therapy, physical therapy, medication, etc.
- Print out your GeoBlue international health insurance card and carry it with you while you travel. You receive GeoBlue international health insurance from Vanderbilt, which provides comprehensive coverage for the duration of your study abroad program. You are registered for GeoBlue once you have committed to studying abroad.

Travel logistics

- Purchase your flight **after** you have committed to your program and read through the arrival instructions. Your program may offer a group flight option as well.
- Usually, **round-trip tickets** are required, whether for visa application or entry requirements. Be sure to check that your program dates are final before booking!
- Student Universe and STA Travel offer cheap flights and flexible cancellation for **student travelers**, and are good places to check for flights. Be sure to compare flights across a few different airlines and travel websites, and always read the fine print on cancelling or changing your flight.
- You may need a visa for every country you visit, and requirements may differ! Pay special attention to your first point of entry and ensure you have all the immigration documents needed.

Store your belongs while you are abroad

- Start thinking about where and how to store your belongings while you're abroad now, so you won't be left scrambling later. Here are some options:
 - Store it with friends;
 - Take it home (or send it home with family)
 - Hire a company to store it for you.
- If you are considering paying for storage, be aware that Vanderbilt's Office of Housing and Residential Education has designated [The UPS Store](#) as its approved vendor for storage. Make sure to ask for any discounts available to VU students. You are always free to choose any vendor you like.

Other things to consider

- ❑ If applicable, use apps such as Duo Lingo to learn some basic phrases of your host country's language.
- ❑ Talk to a program alumni or someone from the countries you will be visiting to learn more about the culture. Guidebook introductions can also be a good source of easy-to-consume information.
- ❑ Download WhatsApp, WeChat, Skype, etc. These are free ways to communicate internationally via wifi. Make sure you download them for your parents/family before you go as well!
- ❑ You may need to utilize a **virtual private network (VPN)** to access U.S. based websites and applications from countries with tighter internet controls (such as China). VPN apps should be downloaded prior to leaving the U.S.
- ❑ Research international coverage for your phone plan and how you can avoid excess charges (these can be really expensive!) Consider buying a cheap burner phone and calling/texting plan once in your host country for local connections, while using wifi solutions (such as Skype) to call home. [Program alumni](#) are a great resource in deciding on a phone plan for abroad.
- ❑ Add Vanderbilt Incident Response for Travel (VIRT) number to your contacts: +1 615 322 2745

PACKING

- ❑ Travel documents **and photocopies**: passport, visa, I-20 (for international students), host country address, program contact, flight confirmation, acceptance letter, etc. Originals and copies should be packed separately.
- ❑ Medications in their original packaging, and copies of the prescription. Be sure to check with your doctor's office beforehand to ensure that your prescriptions are legal in your host country!
- ❑ Be informed about your host country climate and dress code. Pack light! Refer to your study abroad program's packing list for guidance.
- ❑ If you plan to interview for jobs or internships via skype while abroad, make sure to pack interview-appropriate attires.
- ❑ Consider what you should bring with you and what you should buy abroad. Generally, clothing, electronics, and items unavailable in your destination country should be packed. Toiletries, disposable items, and things that are too heavy to pack should be purchased abroad.
- ❑ Know the country's electrical voltage system and common plug shapes. Consumer items and electronics in the US generally run at 110–120 volts, but other countries may have plugs that commonly run at 220–240. Bring **adapters and transformers** with you and leave behind items that might be damaged by a different voltage rating. Most devices have small type on their cords or adapters that indicate their voltage range.
- ❑ Check your airline's baggage requirements and fees!

Carry-on

- ❑ Remember to pack important items, including all of your travel documents and your laptop, in your carry-on bag. It's also not a bad idea to pack toothbrush, toothpaste, and at least one

change of clothes in your carry-on. If your airline loses your luggage, you'll have your most critical items with you.

- ❑ Bring some entertainment – it's a long flight! Consider reading up on your host country, current events and local news, etc.
- ❑ Pack some snacks – but be aware of what food you can and cannot bring into the country (often plants and animal products have to be disposed of before going through customs).
- ❑ A neck pillow and a light jacket may be handy in flight.
- ❑ Make sure that you don't put anything in your carry-on that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will [not allow](#) you to bring aboard.

IN TRANSIT

- ❑ Arrive at the airport early (3 hours is recommended), as you will need to go through immigration channels for international flights.
- ❑ Make sure you fill out your customs card appropriately. These are usually distributed in-flight, and are available on arrival as well. Follow the in-flight instructions.
- ❑ Look out for those signs that tell you what items are not allowed in the country, and eat or throw away unpermitted food!
- ❑ Have your passport ready when you check in and at immigration checkpoints. Know where your other documents are so you can grab them quickly if you need to show something else.
- ❑ Power off your phone to protect digital data when going through immigration.
- ❑ If you are making a connection, you may need to claim your baggage at your first point of entry airport, go through customs screening, and then re-check your baggage before boarding your connecting flight. This is often the case when getting off an international flight for a domestic connection.
- ❑ Get comfortable and stay hydrated! Have extra layers, water, snacks, entertainment, etc. available in your carry-on. Be sure to walk around the plane during flight to help with circulation.

ON ARRIVAL

- ❑ Turn Off Data
 - If your data plan roams internationally you can incur major charges! Be sure that you know the charges you'll incur before turning data back on.
 - If your plan does include international data, be sure to turn on international roaming to access it.
 - You may not be able to call your family immediately when you land. Before you go, schedule a time to call them or find internet to email them; give yourself plenty of time to get to your housing. This way, they won't worry if they don't hear from you as soon as your flight lands!

- Currency Exchange
 - Research where you will get the best exchange rate if you wish to exchange currency. It is a good idea to exchange a small amount of cash before you leave home so you have some on hand when you land.
 - At the host country airport is a great time to get cash out of the ATM if you want to use cash. You may pay a bit more at the airport, but at least you'll have the cash ready if you need it.
- Combating Jet Lag
 - Try to adjust your sleep to match the night hours of your host country when you arrive! If you arrive during the day, try and push through the day by keeping yourself active and not allowing yourself to nap/sleep until bedtime.
 - During the adjustment period, get outside during the daylight if at all possible, and avoid phone/computer screen, especially at night. This will help your mind and body adjust.
- Modes of Transportation
 - Familiarize yourself with your neighborhood and know the best ways to get around!
 - Look into public transport and download the city's public transportation app. Consider getting a bus card/tram pass/etc.
- Cultural Adjustment
 - It's real! Everyone reacts to a new culture differently, but be sure to recognize the feelings you're having and talk about them. Utilize the resources on GEO's website or as available through your program, host university, etc.
- Safety
 - Safely store your passport and other important documents.
 - Stay up-to-date on the health and safety information for your host country. [Travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) is a great site to subscribe to for updates.
 - Always keep emergency contact information on you.
 - Be smart! Behave in way that ensures your own personal safety. Make sure your purse/backpack can't be easily taken, don't flaunt large amounts of money/cash, don't leave things unattended.