

Top Ten Study Abroad Tips for Parents

So your child has decided to study abroad, and there is so much to know. Studying abroad poses many questions for students, but quite a few for parents as well. Don't worry. It's not as bad as it may seem. And to help you, here are a few tips to get you through this exciting, and sometimes overwhelming, time.

Educate Yourself: Chances are you will feel more secure about your child studying abroad if you do the right research.

- Research the destination country, including its history, culture, customs, laws, social/moral codes, dress and language.
- Along with your student, learn a few of the local words and phrases.
- Read all program literature and any available student accounts of studying abroad.
- Never hesitate to ask questions of your student, the advisor or even a program administrator.

Letting Go: Sending your child to study abroad involves a certain amount of letting go on your part. It can be difficult to do, but to ease it, you should begin the process well before departure.

- Allow your student to make the most of the study abroad decisions - be a guide, not a supervisor.
- Give your student the information and resources he or she needs to make informed decisions.
- Don't expect to hear from your student every day while he or she is abroad, and don't make your student feel bad for that.
- Talk with parents whose children have previously studied abroad and try to prepare for the emotions they say they experienced.

Packing: Help your student with what to bring with him or her overseas. Pack light, but also wisely.

- Pack a few extra photos of your student in case he or she needs to get a new passport.
- Have your student walk around with packed bags to make sure he or she will be able to handle it once he or she leaves the house. Your child may be lugging that suitcase around for quite a while during his or her travels.
- If your student wears glasses, get him or her an extra pair or two to take with, particularly if they are prescription lenses.
- If your student is taking any prescription medications, be sure to send him or her overseas with an extra supply and a copy of the prescription. Try to obtain a note from the doctor regarding your child's need for the medication, in case of any issues during the customs process.

Communication: Keeping in touch with your student while he or she is studying overseas is important for both of you.

- Establish a plan of communication with your student prior to departure. It is important to realize that this plan may need to be altered once your child has settled into a study abroad routine.
- Blogs are an inexpensive way in which to keep in touch. Encourage your child to start a blog while away so that you (and any other family members or friends) can follow along with the adventures. You may consider starting your own blog to keep your student current on what is going on back home.
- Your child's cell phone will only work overseas if you have T-Mobile, AT&T or Alltel, and only if you contact the service provider and get them to open up the phone for international roaming, which also means you'll have to pay exorbitant international roaming charges. So devise another

way of keeping in touch by phone. Prepaid international calling cards are a good alternative, as is Skype.

- Students and parents should both have a set of emergency contacts with them at all times, including contacts from the school and program.

Finances: Teaching your student responsible ways with which to handle his or her finances is crucial and can begin even before departure.

- Have your child manage some money on his or her own before departing.
- Devise a financial plan with your child for the time he or she will be abroad. Write down the expenses you expect your child to have and make a column for "needs" and a column for "wants."
- To limit spending and avoid lost money, teach your child to take money out of the ATM a little at a time. For example, on Mondays, have him or her take out the cash he or she will need for each week.
- Don't begin exchanging currency before your child departs-have him or her wait until he or she reach the destination.

Student Responsibility: Helping your student to enhance his or her sense of responsibility can be beneficial to the student as he or she study abroad, and in general.

- Discuss financial, social and academic responsibility with your child. Let him or her know that much of what is expected of him or her at home will be expected of him or her abroad, and more.
- Encourage your student to resolve her or her own issues while abroad and step in only when necessary.
- Have your student do the bulk of the study abroad research. This will not only empower your student, but will also teach him or her the benefit of thinking ahead and analyzing what is best for him or her as an individual.
- Let your student know that you trust him or her to make the right decisions while studying abroad.

Food: One of the most interesting differences between countries is the cuisine, and you will want to make sure that your student eats well while overseas.

- Tell your student to stick to the busy restaurants, as eating at these is likely safer than at less popular restaurants.
- Students should know to check for pasteurization when eating dairy products, as not all countries practice this process in the way they do in the United States.
- Freshly cooked foods are the best bet because they are less likely to contain contaminants.
- Although they may be legally permitted to drink abroad, students should be advised to drink with great care while studying abroad. Alcohol can mix with trouble overseas the same way it can at home.

Safety: This is the largest concern for most parents of students studying abroad. Study abroad tragedies are few and far between, but educate your student on ways to stay safe in another country.

- Students must be encouraged to cultivate and utilize their "street smarts" while studying abroad. Advise them to take the precautions they take at home, as well as new ones. Tell them to avoid political demonstrations, to only take official taxis and to protect their passport at all times.
- Establish emergency procedures with your student prior to departure. Be sure to create a list of emergency contacts.
- Use the [State Department's website](#) to stay current on safety issues in specific countries.

- Tell your student to avoid bringing locals back to his or her living quarters. Socializing can be done away from student housing.

Visitation: You may want to visit your child while he or she is overseas. However, if you choose to do so, do it the right way.

- If you visit, choose to do so at a time that is convenient for your student. Do not try to visit the first or last week of the stay, or during exams.
- Remember that while it may be a vacation for you, your student still has responsibilities.
- You will miss your student, and he or she will miss you, but for ultimate growth, the students needs to spend quality time immersed in the culture and with fellow study abroad students.
- Be prepared to switch roles with your child and allow *him or her* to show *you* a thing or two!

Reentry: Just as you must prepare your student for studying abroad and support him or her while he or she is away, you must also be sensitive to the possibility that your student could experience "reverse culture-shock" when he or she returns home.

- Allow your child a period of adjustment when first getting home.
- Students are used to being more independent, so take that into consideration during the first few weeks after the return.
- Encourage your student to keep in touch with the people he or she traveled with and met while studying abroad. These connections are important and can last the rest of their lives.
- Lend an attentive ear to your child when he or she gets home. He or she probably has a great deal of experiences to share, and it will be a terrific (re)bonding opportunity for both of you.

Source: IIE Passport Parent's Resource

<http://www.iiepassport.org/parents/top-ten-study-abroad-tips-for-parents.html>