Travel 101 for International Travel by Plane

Study Abroad Programs Office
Agenda

- Passports & Visas
- Booking a Flight
- Packing Information & Tips
- Airport Assistance
- Navigating the Airport
- On the Flight
- Arriving in a Foreign Country
- Returning to the USA
- Additional Travel Resources
Passports & Visas
Obtaining a Passport (US)

A passport is needed to leave and enter the US

- First time passport: apply at least 3 months before departure
- Passport renewal: check the expiration date
  - It should not expire within 6 months of your return from your trip abroad, or else you should apply for a renewal at least three months ahead.

WHERE?

- Texas A&M Study Abroad Programs Office (SAPO) is a passport facility for US passport applications. Visit studyabroad.tamu.edu/Passport-Services
- US Post Offices: some locations process passport applications
- Other Passport Acceptance Facilities: Where to Apply
Visas and Non-US passport

• Visit Travel.State.Gov for valuable information

• **Visas**: some countries may require that you obtain a visa (entry permit for a limited amount of time)
  – Check with your provider and embassies to see if you need one
  – Start the process early
  – You will need a valid passport before you can apply for a visa

• If you will be traveling with a **non-US passport**, you may be required to obtain a visa for your destination
  – Research and work with the appropriate embassies or consulates
Checklist for Study Abroad

✓ Passport
  ✓ Check expiration date
  ✓ Apply/Renew by 3 months prior to departure at the LATEST!!!
  ✓ Expedite if needed

✓ Funding
  ✓ Visit Texas A&M Scholarships and Financial Aid (SFAID)
  ✓ Check “Funding” page on SAPO website
  ✓ Talk to your department/college

✓ Purchase airfare

✓ Make sure you are up to date with vaccines
  ✓ Check Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), visit the Beutel Health Center, or consult your primary care doctor for country specific requirements

✓ Work on study abroad portal checklist
Booking a Flight
# Booking a Flight: three options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Travel Agency</th>
<th>Call in</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allows you to shop around</td>
<td>Allows you to speak with someone directly and get help making booking or book online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good for people who like to physically see the options</td>
<td>Might have student rates</td>
<td>Does not allow you to compare costs from airline to airline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates and availability can change quickly</td>
<td>Provides support if there are hiccups in your travel</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="#">Click here for more details</a></td>
<td>Might include a service fee or not work with all airlines</td>
<td><a href="#">Click here for more details</a></td>
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Booking Checklist

✓ Airport, city, and country are correct

✓ Date of arrival into destination is correct

✓ Time of arrival is correct (check AM/PM)

✓ Double check the flight guidelines provided by your advisor or program coordinator
  ✓ VERY important if there are group transfers

✓ Be sure to mention/note any dietary restrictions
Layovers

• All layovers should be at least 2 hours

• Avoid layovers in countries on the TAMU Country Risk Summaries List

• Check the layover duration because some may be overnight

• Avoid layovers that involve an airport change (ex. flying into New York JFK and out of Newark EWR)
  • Even for frequent travelers, these can be tricky
Book Online

• Use site such as Kayak.com or Google Flights to compare options

• Book directly through airlines’ or travel agencies’ websites
  • They can assist if you have a problem (ex. flight cancellation or missed connection)

• Use filters to sort by:
  • Price
  • Number of stops
  • Layover duration → try to have at least 2 hours between flights
  • Layover location (in the US or another country)
  • Departure time
  • Arrival time
  • Airline
Book through Travel Agency

• This can be a local agency or a national one (e.g. STA or Student Universe)

• Have all information about your trip ready and in front of you

• Inquire about student rates and payment plans (sometimes available)

• Inquire about travel insurance
Book on the phone

- Identify which airline has the best itinerary for you and call that one (typically a 1-800 toll free number)
- Have all travel details and needs in front of you when you call
- This is a good option if you need help making a change to your itinerary
- Order special meal if desired (international flights only)
Frequent Flyer Miles

- Frequent flyer programs allow customers with accounts to earn points or “miles” – it is basically a loyalty program

- They are free to join, so ALWAYS join one and use your number every time you fly that airline
  - You can often earn miles even after purchasing airfare
  - After a certain number of miles, you may be eligible for travel perks (ex. upgrades, priority boarding, free flights)
Packing Information & Tips
Packing

• Consider ALL weather (day and night, beginning and end of trip, seasons, different locations, if applicable)

• Pack light – Layers and double-duty clothes are best

• Check size and weight requirements of ALL airlines you’ll be flying

• Check what kinds of plugs the country uses and buy a plug adapter (and voltage converter if necessary)
  – This site may be helpful:
    https://www.iec.ch/worldplugs/list_bylocation.htm
Luggage

• “Carry on” bag: bags you bring with you onto the plane yourself
  – Can be a purse, backpack, or a small suitcase

• “Checked bag”: a bag/suitcase you leave with an agent to have shipped through on the bottom of the plane
  – You’ll pick it up at the next airport or the airport of your final destination
  – Check with your airline(s) about how many checked bags you can have
  – Check with your airline(s) about fees
Packing: Carry On

Bring essentials on the plane with you:
- Printed copy of accommodation address and phone number,
- Medications, Glasses, Jewelry/valuables, Change of clothes,
- Book/entertainment, Snacks, Electronics (incl. chargers),
- Sweater in case the plane is cold

- Keep your passport with you at all times. Do not put it in your large checked suitcase!

- Most airlines allow 1 personal item (e.g. a purse/laptop case) and 1 carry on (e.g. small duffel bag)

- To check if an item is allowed or not in your carry on: https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/all
Packing: Carry On

• **Transportation Security Administration (TSA)** – Information, videos, and tips for travelling domestically and internationally

• The TSA limits the amount of liquids you may bring in your carry-on bag. Follow the 3-1-1 Rule

  
  Includes any liquid, aerosol, gel, cream or paste

  **Exemptions** for medications or infant/child nourishments
Packing: Electronics

• Pack electronics in your carry-on bag

• Samsung Galaxy Note 7 phones are banned by all airlines and the TSA
  – Banned from carry-on AND checked bags

• Make sure your electronic devices are fully charged
  – Why? (1) in case you cannot charge it during your travels (2) if the TSA inspects the device and it does not turn on, they may confiscate it
Airport Assistance:
Medical, Mobility, Dietary & Other Services
Disability & Medical Conditions

- The TSA has special procedures for those with disabilities or medical conditions. To find out more information: https://www.tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures

- The TSA also has a toll-free helpline, TSA Cares, that can help you navigate their policies & what to expect: 1-855-787-2227
Dietary Restrictions

• If your flight includes a meal, be sure to let the airline know of your dietary restrictions in advance
  – You may be able to do this online, but if not, please call the airline
  – Meals meeting most common restrictions (ex. gluten-free, dairy-free) are typically available. If you have a very restrictive diet, it might be wise to bring snacks with you, just in case
Physical Disability

• If you will require wheelchair assistance, call your airline no later than 72 hours prior to your flight to request this service
  – You may be able to do this online

• Travelers with mobility conditions may also be permitted to board the plane early. Be sure to check-in with your gate agent if you will need additional time boarding
Aids, Devices & Medications

• If you use a mobility aid or device, x-ray screening of the device(s) may be required
  – Be sure to let the TSA agent know what you are or are not physically able to do.

• Hearing aids typically do not need to be removed

• You are allowed to use ice pack/freezer packs if your medication must remain cold
Service Animals

• Check with your airline for their service animal or emotional support animal policy
  – NOTE: flights over 8 hours may have more requirements than short or domestic flights
  – Many airlines will now only accept cats, dogs and miniature horses. If you have any other type of animal, confirm with your airline BEFORE booking your flight

• Check out MIUSA’s Guide for Travelling with a Guide Dog or Service Animal
Service Animals (cont.)

• Notify your airline **no later than** 72 hours before departure that you will be travelling with a service animal or ESA.

• Be sure to bring the required documentation with you to the airport even if you submitted copies beforehand.

• All animals will need to be screened at the airport security checkpoint.
Navigating the Airport
Arriving at the Airport

• Arrive 3 hours prior to flight departure time and go to your airline’s check-in desk

• Check in
  – Sometimes can be done online 24 hours in advance or at a self-serve kiosk in the airport
  – If you cannot check-in online, talk to an agent at the check-in desk
  – Have your booking/confirmation number, ticket number, and identification (passport, for international travel) ready
Navigating the Airport

- Large airports are divided into “terminals”. They may be connected by foot, bus or airport train.

- Check from which terminal your flight is scheduled to depart before going to the airport (may be A, B, C, D, etc. or 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). Upon arrival, check the Departures screen.

- Most airports now have a kiosk for you to print your boarding pass and your luggage sticker. You will then stand in line to deliver your checked luggage to an airline agent. You will keep your luggage receipt and your carry-on with you.

- Keep your ticket easily accessible at all times.

- Ask an agent if you have questions!
Security

After checking your suitcase with the airline and printing your boarding pass, you will need to go through security to go to your gate:

• Usually there are several lines. Verify that the line that you are in takes you to the gate you want

• An agent will check your ID/passport and ticket (may be paper or on your phone)

• While in line: take off your belt and empty your pockets. You may be asked to remove your shoes to go through the scanner

• If you have liquids in your carry on, place the plastic bag in the security bin
Security (cont’d)

• Listen to the agents. They usually repeat instructions loudly every minute or so
  – Take out laptops/tablets
  – Take off shoes
  – Food may need to go through separately

• No one likes going through security (travelers or agents). Just try to be as pleasant and calm as possible
  – Get an idea of what to expect: https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening
The Gate

• “Gate” = the door where you enter the flight

• Get to the gate early and make sure it’s still the right gate for your flight. Check the gate number as it may change

• Board flight by group. Check your ticket for your group number or letter

• You may need to show your passport to the agent at the gate
On the Flight

• Keep anything you will want to access on the flight below the seat in front of you
  – This includes your passport and address abroad for the immigration paperwork you may have to fill out before landing

• Put your phone, tablet, and other electronic devices in ‘Airplane Mode’
  – Typically found within ‘Settings,’ but varies by device
On the Flight (cont.)

• Stand up from time to time and drink plenty of water. This is the best way to fight jetlag and dehydration

• If the flight gets bumpy ("turbulence"), do not panic. Secure your seatbelt & follow the flight attendants’ instructions
Arriving in a Foreign Country & Re-Entry to the USA
Immigration: passport control

• Usually two categories of lines:
  – Ex: Local passport holders/foreign passport holders
  – Ex: US and EU passport holders/other passport holders

• If on a short study abroad program, do not say “study abroad,” say “tourist” as your reason for visiting since you are not enrolling as a student in the foreign university and to avoid confusing the agent

• If you have a student visa or an offer letter from a host institution, say ‘study abroad’
Customs

• This is where agents check that you are not bringing unwanted items into their country

• Unwanted/banned items typically include: Fresh fruit or other plants, animal products, illegal medications or drugs

• Usually you declare any items on your customs form (given on plane)
Foreign Currency

• Most foreign countries do not use the US dollar. Look up the currency in the country you will be visiting beforehand.

• You will need local currency upon arrival. Options:
  – See if you can order some through your US bank a few weeks before departing.
  – Bring US cash and change money upon arrival at airport kiosks (not open very late at night).
  – Withdraw local cash from an ATM at the airport using your US debit card – this is the most efficient option.
Money Tips

• Tell your bank/credit card company you will be traveling abroad before you go, so that they do not block your account

• Do not carry too much money at once. Keep most cash in a safe place, like a hotel safe or locked locker at a hostel

• Carry “small” bills. In US currency, these are usually $20 or less. Large bills may come out of the ATM, so try to break them at your hotel or a big store as soon as possible

• Check fees from your bank, credit card, and local ATMs to help keep track of how much you “lose” each time you withdraw cash or use your card

• Use your foreign currency before you return to the US
  – typically, currency exchange places will not accept coins, so be sure to use all of those
Using your Phone Abroad

• Either turn off your cell service or keep your phone in Airplane Mode if you do not have (or do not want to use) an international plan
  – Some plans automatically kick into affect, and can begin accruing significant fees

• If you have an unlocked phone, you can buy a local SIM card & use it with your phone
  – This tends to be much cheaper than your home cell service carrier’s plans

• You can also purchase a prepaid phone (either before departure or in country)
  – If so, either leave your regular phone at home or make sure that it is in airplane mode at all times
Re-Entry into the USA

When you arrive in the US, you will go through US customs & immigration again

– This will be at the airport you FIRST arrive into in the US (ex. if you have a layover in New York before returning to Texas, you will go through customs & immigration in New York)

– You will have to pick up your luggage. After customs, you can give your checked suitcase to the booth called ‘Connected Flights’ that will check it through to your final destination
Additional Travel Resources
Sources & Additional Resources

- US Department of State – Travel: travel.state.gov
  - Information on applying for a US passport, enrolling in STEP, and country-specific travel details
- Transportation Security Administration (TSA)
  - Special Procedures: Disability & Medical
- Oanda Currency Converter
- MIUSA: Disability Resources A-Z
- Diversity Abroad: Destination Guides
  - Fill out this quick interest survey to request information about a specific country