

# A Guide to Studying Abroad

**By:**  
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**C O N N E X I O N S**

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## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Choosing whether or not to study abroad</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Pros and Cons of studying abroad</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Planning for a course of study abroad</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Arriving abroad for a course of study</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Common pitfalls when studying abroad</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>Attributions</b>	<b>12</b>



# Chapter 1

## Choosing whether or not to study abroad<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Choosing whether or not to study abroad

Making the decision on whether or not to study abroad can sometimes be difficult. There are some clear benefits and other - less obvious - challenges. If you have a clear idea of how all of these balance up for you, making a final decision becomes a lot easier.

#### 1.1.1 Your academic career

One of the most obvious benefits of studying abroad is that you will almost certainly get a different perspective on the subjects studied. Education in terms of its focus, delivery and content varies from country to country. Exposure to a different approach and sometimes new ideas can be healthy in bringing a new perspective.

The differences are also sometimes a disadvantage. For example, many students (especially at undergraduate level) from US and UK universities that go to study in Continental Europe get a shock. Changing from a group- and discussion-based learning environment to a more ‘taught’ one with hundreds of other students sharing a lecture hall, and little contact with teachers, can feel a little like ‘going back to school’.

Actions:

- Find out about the how the courses you plan to take will be taught.
- Consider how the courses fit with your current and future studies.

#### 1.1.2 Language

Make an honest evaluation about whether your language skills (if appropriate) are good enough to be able to study in the foreign language. Depending on your course of study, you may find you can get educated abroad in English at some Continental European universities (the Netherlands and Scandinavia are good examples of countries where there is good availability of courses).

If you are concerned about your language ability, consider whether you will be able to spend some time in the country prior to the course. If you have a base in a language, this can be an effective way to improve your skills. Consider working, finding an internship and/or taking an intensive language course.

Actions:

- Evaluate your language skills
- Plan time to improve them if necessary

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m15061/1.1/>>.

### 1.1.3 Money

Studying in a foreign country will almost certainly be more expensive than in your home country. Make sure you make a realistic budget in advance; find out about living costs, especially for accommodation, food and other essentials. Some things may be much more expensive where you are going to be living, finding out in advance can save some nasty surprises later.

Plan for travel expenses and make sure you allow yourself the option to come home to visit; most people get a little homesick at one point or another.

Find out about grants, bursaries or other assistance that might be available to you. In some countries, foreign students can also get access to help; France is a good example, as there is subsidised housing for students.

Actions:

- Find out about costs
- Find out what financial assistance might be available
- Make a personal budget

### 1.1.4 Your personal life

Studying abroad usually means being separated from your ‘social support’ network back home. You may be away from your partner, family and friends. This is also part of the adventure as meeting new people and making new friends is one of the most valuable elements of studying abroad.

If you have a partner who will not be coming with you, it is important to make sure that you discuss the situation in advance. Even with mobile phones, email, video-conferencing and cheap air fares, a long-distance relationship can be tough.

If you have a family, make sure you discuss it with them before making a decision. Living for a period in another country can be an extraordinarily enriching and enjoyable experience. However, some people may not be as open to change and find the prospect of moving abroad an unattractive one.

Trivia: Although studying abroad might seem tough on a personal level, many people are finding the exact opposite is the case. Europe has seen a massive increase in cross-border marriages which are a direct by-product of the European Erasmus and Da Vinci schemes that give financial grants to students taking a course of study or an internship in another EU country.

Actions:

- Talk to people close to you before making a decision
- Plan for trips home in advance

## 1.2 Online Resources

- <http://www.justlanded.com><sup>2</sup> – information about studying abroad<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>



## Chapter 2

# Pros and Cons of studying abroad<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Pros and Cons of studying abroad

Taking a course of study in a foreign country is becoming more and more popular. The experience is valued by students and potential employers. However, there are positive and negative points to be taken into account.

#### 2.1.1 Pros

- In many cases grants are available to cover some or all of the tuition and/or living costs during the period abroad (enquire at your home institution).
- Acquiring advanced language skills can be personally enriching and an asset for your future.
- Experiencing another educational system can be instructive and insightful.
- You may make friends from all over the world.
- An opportunity to get to know and travel around a country in a way that is not possible on a holiday or short visit.

#### 2.1.2 Cons

- Travel and living costs may be considerably higher than a comparable period at your home institution, even if you are receiving a grant to cover some of the costs.
- The amount which you learn may be less if learning in a foreign language and your academic performance in that language may be limited.
- You may find the type of teaching unproductive; especially if you are going from an environment with lots of teacher/student contact to one with lectures and large classes.
- You may find it difficult to adapt to a different social environment.

### 2.2 Online Resources

- <http://www.justlanded.com><sup>2</sup> – information about studying abroad<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m15067/1.1/>>.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>



## Chapter 3

# Planning for a course of study abroad<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Planning for a course of study abroad

Getting ready for a course of study abroad can be more complicated than starting a new semester at your home university. Take into account that some things may take longer at a distance and you might have to navigate your way through unfamiliar bureaucracy.

#### 3.1.1 Do some homework

You may have a tutor at your home institution responsible for your course of study abroad. Try to see them as soon as you can and get as much information as possible. It might also be possible to talk to a student who has studied where you are going to study; if so, they may be a source of useful tips. Check out any information your institution has online and also the website of the institution you are going to. The quality and quantity of information available will vary, but in some cases it is quite comprehensive.

#### 3.1.2 Visas and permits

Find out if you need a study visa (many countries are covered at Just Landed<sup>2</sup>). If you do, find out from the consulate of the country you are going to what they will require for the application. Common things include a passport valid for the time of the visa, a letter from the host institution confirming your course of study, passport photos, a completed form and the payment of a visa application fee. The requirements and the time needed for the visa to be issued will vary from country to country. You may not be able to travel without the visa, so don't leave this until the final deadline.

#### 3.1.3 Get the academic paperwork done

Find out what forms need to be filled in and get them done as soon as possible. A useful tip is to make a photocopy or scan of any forms you are sending off and keep them in a safe place in case they get lost. If you are expecting a confirmation, do not leave it until the last minute to chase it up. Things do get lost and it is usually easier to fix problems when there is time to do so and not when you find you cannot inscribe yourself. Try to find out in advance what you will need to do to inscribe yourself and sign up for courses when you get there.

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m15062/1.1/>>.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.justlanded.com>

### 3.1.4 Grants

If you are applying for a grant, do so as soon as possible. In some cases, there are a restricted number of places and getting your application in early may improve your chances.

### 3.1.5 Find a place to live

This is probably the most important thing you will have to get done. Many people opt for accommodation in halls of residence or other student housing. This can be a good idea from a social point of view and has the distinct advantage of making it easier to make new friends. You should be able to find out about different options from the office handling foreign students at the institution you are going to.

If you plan to be looking for a place to live on your own or with friends going to the same place, make sure that you allow enough time to find somewhere. In many cities, the beginning of the academic year is a tough time to find a place to live as there are so many students looking. Make sure you have identified and booked some options for cheap temporary accommodation (check availability in student residences if looking before the start of term).

### 3.1.6 Plans for the summer?

If you don't have plans for the time before your period of study abroad, consider going to work there. This can be a really good way to get to know the country, improve language skills and generally settle in.

### 3.1.7 What do you need to take?

Generally this will depend on where you will be living. The best advice is to be conservative and only take what you know you will really need; you might be surprised about how much this is! When you have this organised, you can think about deciding between the spare hairdryer and your favourite fondu set.

The cost of taking excess baggage on planes is high and many airlines are stricter about limits than they used to be. You can ship items separately, but there is always the risk of damage or loss. If you are travelling by car, you obviously have more flexibility – but, remember that it may be a long drive and you can damage a car if you overload it.

### 3.1.8 Cash

Make sure you have access to cash and know how you will continue to access it. It may take a while to open a local bank account for money to be transferred to. You may also find your debit or credit cards have limits for foreign cash withdrawals and/or have very unattractive exchange rates and commissions associated with this process. On the other hand, carrying large amounts of cash around is not to be recommended either; take sensible precautions.

### 3.1.9 Say goodbye

Don't organise your going away party on the night before you leave, especially if you have not started packing!

## 3.2 Online Resources

- <http://www.justlanded.com><sup>3</sup> – information about studying abroad<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>

## Chapter 4

# Arriving abroad for a course of study<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1 Arriving abroad for a course of study

There is normally a pile of things which need to get done when you arrive in a new country for a course of study. The biggest of these can be avoiding a new social scene for long enough to find time to get everything done. The following are some of the things you would be well advised to not forget.

#### 4.1.1 Registration with the authorities

Some countries require foreigners to register their presence in the country (even when the individual has entered the country with the correct visa). You should find out whether this is required, what you need to do and where you need to go (typically a police station or the local town hall). In the same way this requirement varies from country to country, the potential punishment can vary if you are caught in an illegal situation. Best advice is not to risk deportation and make sure you follow the local rules.

#### 4.1.2 Registration with your host institution

The instructions on what you need to do should have been given to you in some form in advance. Make sure you read all of the paperwork and if you don't understand what you need to do ask someone for help. Some institutions have processes which don't even make sense to local students!

#### 4.1.3 Language courses

Many courses of foreign study have a period of language lessons before the course starts. If not, you should consider finding some language lessons (many institutions provide these). These lessons are normally optional, so in the rush of arriving and reorganised a new life some people miss them. Unless you have perfect abilities in the local language, you are strongly recommended not to.

#### 4.1.4 Get settled in

Spend some time making your own living space your own. Some people feel a bit lonely in their first days or weeks somewhere new. Making your room yours can be a real help.

#### 4.1.5 Get connected

You might find it helps to get a phone as soon as possible. If you are using a mobile/cell to make and receive calls abroad, you will probably get a shock at the next bill, so getting a local phone is a must if you can't

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m15068/1.1/>>.

live without it. Depending on where you are living, getting internet connectivity may be more complicated. Be aware that if you have to get a phone connected or DSL service turned on it can take weeks in many places.

#### **4.1.6 Tell mum you are OK**

Some parents are a little apprehensive about their kids studying in a foreign country. Make sure you keep in touch after the first call to say you have arrived OK.

#### **4.1.7 Meet the locals**

Once you have finished the administration, it is time to get out and get to know your new home. If you are speaking a foreign language, take on board the fact that the only way you will get better is through practice, practice and more practice. People may well not understand a word you are saying at first (and likewise, you may have trouble understanding them). Keep trying, as a little perseverance will mean you soon make some progress and this will really pay off later. Talk to whoever you can, whenever you can.

#### **4.1.8 Online Resources**

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>

## Chapter 5

# Common pitfalls when studying abroad<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1 Common pitfalls when studying abroad

There are many different challenges in taking a course of study abroad. These are the four most common problems identified by students who have completed courses of study abroad. The last two are problems related to studying in a country where a different language is spoken, so skip them if this does not apply to you.

#### 5.1.1 Help! I don't know any locals!

As foreign students all tend to arrive at the same time, are in the same position and are sometimes provided accommodation separate from local students, there is a tendency for friends to be made between the foreigners.

An extreme version of this problem is when groups form from a single nationality or people speaking the same language. An bizarre example is the Catalan whose year studying in France meant he improving his Castellano (Spanish); he hung out with the Spanish crowd.

Some people complain that the local students are not very welcoming to foreign students or that they find it difficult to make friends. Like anywhere, it can sometimes be difficult to make new friends and get into new social circles. You might find the language difficult, or be meeting people who don't seem to be very interested in you. The best advice is to stick with it. Getting to know people in the country you are visiting will give you a whole new perspective. You cannot truly start to understand a country and its people until you have eaten at their tables, spent an afternoon arguing whose country is best and have then gone out and partied with them their way. You may need to make more effort at the beginning, but it is well worth it.

#### 5.1.2 I am not learning anything

Education between different countries varies widely. For instance a first year student in the UK will get a completely different experience from someone entering university in France. The UK tends to have a focus on more seminar/discussion-based teaching and self-directed learning, while in France the first year is used to start filtering students out; so get massive lecture halls crammed with people and exams where you are expected to re-form lecture notes into answers. This can be a shock to some students, and in some cases causes a lack of motivation with the work. Try to avoid this in advance if possible, but if you get stuck in the middle of an academic nightmare, do your best as it will only be for a limited amount of time.

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m15063/1.1/>>.

### 5.1.3 I am having trouble performing

Written academic work and examinations in a foreign language can be a real challenge. In many cases, a level of leniency is given to non-native speakers when marking papers and evaluating performance. This is especially true in the Sciences. However, you do need to be aware that in the Arts, especially languages and literature, you may not receive such favourable treatment.

The additional overhead of reading and writing in a foreign language makes studying harder work. When reading you may find it more difficult to retain information; this is normal, but it does make it hard work. You may be a talented essay writer in your own language, but find yourself producing disjointed and incomprehensible texts in another language (even when you have a good level of language ability). This can be frustrating and at times disheartening. This situation can be especially ‘hard’ for more intelligent students who are more used to not having to work ‘too’ hard to make the grades.

You might also be faced with subjects that are near impossible to do well in. For example, if you are studying French and go to study Lettres Françaises at a French university, you may well end up with a compulsory course of Ancien Français. Sparing the details, it is a whole lot harder than Shakespearean English and you will have to write about it and discuss it in French. This is a tough subject for most French students and certainly not one that is easy to deal with for a foreigner.

Best advice is:

- Do as much as you can to improve your language skills in advance of starting your course
- If you are finding the language element tough, try to put in extra effort on this side
- Get local help if you need it, if you can find someone who is studying your language, you might have the basis for a mutually beneficial collaboration!
- Check out the compulsory and elective parts of the course and make sure there are no nasty surprises in there

### 5.1.4 I don’t need to learn the language

In many countries (for example, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and many Asian countries), there are more and more courses available in English. This is especially true for business education at MBA level.

The language of the country you are studying in may be of limited future use or hard to learn. However you will find that an investment of your time in learning it will define how you experience your time in the country (see the first point above). Even if you only reach an intermediate level of language proficiency in your time in the foreign country, you will find some real benefits and are far more likely to have a richer, more enjoyable experience overall.

## 5.2 Online Resources

- <http://www.justlanded.com><sup>2</sup> – information about studying abroad<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.justlanded.com/>



## Index of Keywords and Terms

**Keywords** are listed by the section with that keyword (page numbers are in parentheses). Keywords do not necessarily appear in the text of the page. They are merely associated with that section. *Ex.* apples, § 1.1 (1) **Terms** are referenced by the page they appear on. *Ex.* apples, 1

**A** abroad, § 1(1), § 3(5), § 4(7), § 5(9)  
arrival, § 4(7)

**C** choosing, § 1(1)

**P** pitfalls, § 5(9)  
planning, § 3(5)

**S** study, § 1(1), § 3(5), § 4(7), § 5(9)

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## **A Guide to Studying Abroad**

This short course is to help students preparing for a course of study abroad. It deals with the decision, selecting a foreign institution, preparing for the move and what to do when you get there.

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