

Things you should know before sending your child abroad

Are you sending your kid out into the big bad world for the first time on their own? We understand your fears.

It's a decision that will impact the rest of their lives. Reaching far beyond academics and careers, study abroad can open minds and create global friendships. While study abroad's rewards are immense, it can rattle the nerves of even the easiest going parents. Practical issues, such as finances, can also make you rethink whether study abroad is worth it.

Before giving it the boot, it's important to have a reflection on why study abroad is so valuable to your child's development, and to explore solutions to your big concerns. The more knowledge you have, the more likely you will feel comfortable, and can support them on this life-changing experience.

WHY IS STUDY ABROAD SO IMPORTANT?

In our globally-connected world, spending a semester or year in another country gives students a unique chance to develop skills that will benefit them both professionally and personally. In the past few decades, the number of U.S. students studying abroad has more than tripled, according to The Institute of International Education's 2012 Open Doors report.

If you're a bit nervous about letting them spread their wings, remember to focus on the positive impacts that this experience will bring:

Study abroad...

- Teaches real-world skills that aren't found in classrooms "Students today will be competing for jobs with peers around the world, and those jobs will require advanced knowledge and non-routine skills," said the U.S. Department of Education's new plan, "Succeeding Globally Through International Education and Engagement." Today, cultural awareness and second language proficiency are two skills that companies drastically need. Study abroad can help students hone both, which can set them apart in today's competitive job market.

- Improves proficiency in a second language Experiencing daily life in another country means learning how a language is spoken "in real life": the facial expressions, body language, and the local idioms that a textbook just can't teach. Studying Mandarin for a few hours a week at home won't deliver the same results as would living in Beijing for a semester. Total immersion is the bridge to language fluency.
- Builds global friendships and connections One of the most enriching experiences of studying abroad are the friendships made with people from around the world. Many of these friendships continue long, long after students return home. Your child will also likely be around others who are studying in their field, which can greatly expand their global, professional network.
- Develops confidence and independence Adapting to culture shock, trying bizarre foods, and figuring out a new subway system are all part of the experience! Students often return home with a renowned sense of self-confidence in their abilities to problem solve and adapt to life's challenges. And this is a great mindset to have!

COMMON CONCERNS...AND SOLUTIONS.

Whether it's your child's first time abroad or not, it's still scary to think that they will be so far away. You will be surrendering control, but remember that this is a healthy part of watching them grow up.

I. STAYING SAFE ABROAD

Whether it's a volatile protest making world headlines, or a certain, action-thriller movie starring Liam Neeson that you just watched, the media certainly doesn't quell parents' fears over sending their children overseas. However, the vast majority of study abroad experiences are incident-free. If you're in the U.S., it's even possible that your home city or town has a higher violent crime rate than your student's desired study abroad town. (I sure felt safer in Denmark than I ever did at home in San Francisco!) But no matter the statistics, make sure to talk to your child about these issues:



Your child will find adventure around every corner

- **Learn about the host country** Becoming familiar with the local laws, customs, and embassy locations, will help you both feel more comfortable. For detailed advice about your student's country, check out the U.S Bureau of Consular Affairs website, which lists country-specific health information, safety tips, travel advice, and any current travel warnings for your citizens abroad.
- **Be smart with valuables and money** Just like at home, pickpocketing can happen anywhere, so being extra-cautious in crowded areas is the best advice. Tell your child to only carry small amounts of cash whenever they go out, and to leave the rest in a secure place in their room. Read a few more important safety tips for travellers.
- **Staying healthy abroad** Insurance. Medication. Vaccines. There may be a lot to think about, but preparing early will help you feel better. Consider purchasing international travel insurance. If your child takes medication, make sure they have enough for their entire time abroad, along with a copy of their prescription. Finally, knowing how to cope with injury and sickness while abroad will arm you both with more knowledge.

Finally, create a list of important contact numbers for you and your child. If they lose something, acting fast is key. This list should include bank card information, along with the number to call to report a lost or stolen card. They may also want to bring a backup debit or credit card (for emergency use). This way, they can still withdraw money if they're waiting for a replacement card to be mailed. If they lose their passport, they'll need to contact the local

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embassy. Along with a photocopy of their passport, make sure that they carry several passport-sized photos in case they need to apply for a replacement abroad.

If you're nervous about your child navigating an airport alone (and they're under 18), you're in luck. You can set up an "unaccompanied minor" service through the airline. Basically, an airline staff member will greet your child at check-in, escort them to their gate, and ensure a successful boarding. Each airline has its own policy, so you will need to call and arrange this in advance.

2. COMMUNICATION AND KEEPING IN TOUCH

Knowing that you can call your child quickly and easily is extremely comforting. Luckily, you have a lot of options. Today, with video technology and free phone applications, students use variety of ways to touch base with the folks back home.

- **International cell phones** If your student plans on bringing their phone abroad, remember that international calls will be quite expensive. Most students choose to buy a prepaid phone once they're abroad for making locals calls, and opt to use Skype or a similar application to make cheap calls home (more on this later.) Here's a breakdown of your phone use options abroad:



Be mindful your child will be busy, but set up times to chat!

- **Roaming with your home provider** If your child's mobile automatically works abroad, they're probably roaming. They will have the same number, which is convenient, but the international roaming fees can be brutal. To avoid this, make sure they turn off their phone's data roaming settings and email alters.

- **Purchase an international phone plan** If your child plans on taking their mobile abroad, and you don't want to pay sky-high roaming fees, you can purchase an "add on" international phone plan through your home provider, which can reduce international rates (even if only by a small amount.) Check with your provider about different options.
- **Purchasing a foreign SIM card** Some students will buy a local, pay-as-you-go SIM card to swap into their own phone to make local calls while abroad. However, they can only do this if their phone is "unlocked" and able to accept a foreign SIM card. A lot of U.S. phones are locked, so they will need call their provider to find out.

- **Purchasing a prepaid phone** Pay-as-you go phones, easily found in kiosks and phone stores abroad, are the most cost-effective and popular way for students to communicate with each other while abroad. However, don't count on them for long-distance chats, since international calls can drain minutes fast!

Be sure to set up a communication schedule with your child. While you don't want to smother them with calls, it helps to be on the page about how often you should expect to hear from them. Some things to go over include *How will your child contact you to let you know they've arrived safely? If they travel to other countries while abroad, would you like them to email you their plans? Who are your emergency contacts, both abroad and at home?*

Read a few more of our tips about staying in touch with your kid while they're studying abroad.

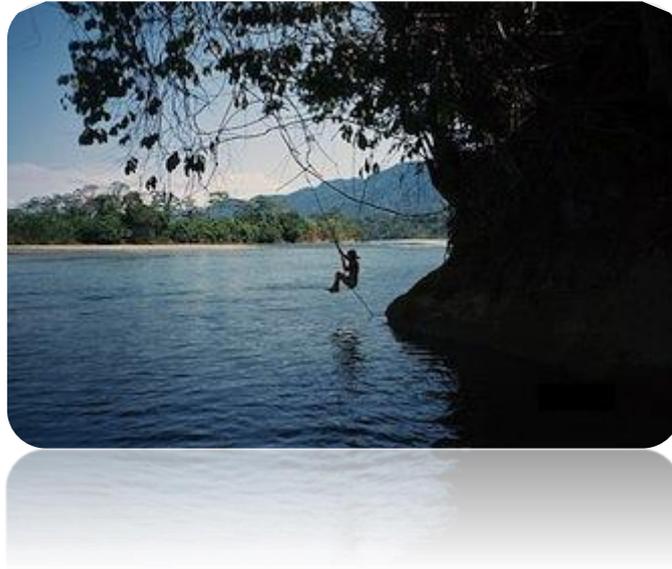
POPULAR, FREE APPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATING LONG DISTANCE:

- **Skype is a life-saver.** This free and easy-to-download application lets you make calls to other Skype accounts for free. Calling landlines and mobiles is low-cost, and you can easily reload minutes to your Skype account. Video calls are another great perk. If your student has a foreign cell phone, they can set up their Skype account to forward all incoming, international calls straight to their local phone. This is a great way to keep in touch!
- **WhatsApp** This free smart phone application lets you send messages to other phones who also use this application. WhatsApp works internationally, and with no SMS fees, it's a great option if you plan on texting your child a lot.
- **Facebook** If you've already joined thousands of other parents embarrassing their kids on Facebook everyday, you can utilize the chat function to quickly touch base with your child. Consider downloading the "Facebook Messenger App" to ease this process even more.

3. PAYING FOR STUDY ABROAD

You might have been completely on board this study abroad train...until you saw the price tag. If it's a big concern, see if your child can search for programs that better suit their budget and

needs. Encourage them to apply for scholarships through their study abroad program, home university, local cultural organizations, and national scholarship funds. Pass along these 40 fundraising ideas for study abroad, and make sure they scour this list of 65 Study Abroad Grants and Scholarships.



Talk with your child before they jump into the unknown!

The key is to keep your communication about financing your child's study abroad trip open. The earlier you can begin fiscally planning for the trip the better. Don't fear having your kid put in some (or a lot!) of legwork to make their semester abroad a reality. Read more savings.

As you weigh your concerns against the rewards of studying abroad, you'll hopefully begin to feel more comfortable with giving your child the green light. Even though my parents are veteran travellers, I know that my mom was still nervous the days leading up to my departure.

As a parent, it's normal to feel this way, but it's important to remember that letting go and trusting is apart of the process of watching them grow up. And when they return, they'll have many memories and lessons from this amazing life experience!

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