

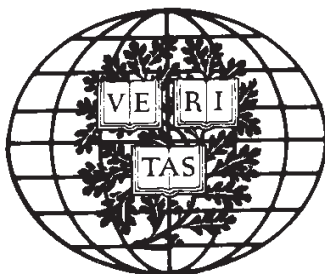
BEFORE YOU GO: Overseas Travel Advice

by

Josephine Jane Pavese

Paul A. Bohlmann

Sophie Gladding



OCS Publications

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

Harvard University • Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Karen From and Heather Kirtland for their thoughtful and thorough editing.

© 1991, 1993, 2000 President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any way without the express written permission of the Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences Office of Career Services.

5/02

Office of Career Services
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Harvard University
54 Dunster Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-2595
www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu

Contents

- 1 Foreword**
- 1 Basic Preparation**
- 2 Adjusting to Life Abroad**
 - Culture Shock
 - Reentry Adjustment
 - Women's Concerns
 - Race and Ethnicity Concerns
 - Concerns of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered Students
- 7 Health and Safety Abroad**
 - Insurance
 - Inoculations and Preventive Health Measures
 - Local Laws and Customs and Your Behavior
 - Reducing the Risk of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)
 - Keeping Alert
 - Vehicle Safety
 - Precautions Against Terrorism
- 12 Government Assistance Abroad**
- 13 Money Matters**
- 15 Passports, Visas, and Official Travel Documents**
- 16 Communication**
 - Computers and E-mail
 - Laptops
 - Telephones
- 18 A Final Word**
- 18 Resources**
 - General
 - Sub-Saharan Africa
 - North Africa and the Middle East
 - Asia
 - Europe
 - Latin America
 - Intercultural Press
 - Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered Travelers
 - For more information
- 25 Checklists**
 - Destination Research Checklist
 - Travel Checklist

Foreword

Harvard University believes in the value of international experience and encourages you to incorporate international exploration into your ongoing education, career development, and personal growth. Whether through study, work, research, public service, or casual or purposeful travel, there is nothing like international experience to expand your horizons.

A recent Harvard fellowship recipient wrote from overseas:

This was my first experience abroad, and I discovered very quickly that each week is an opportunity that is mine to use or waste, which has prompted me to explore myself and those around me in a way I never did at home. I hope this is a lesson in living that I will retain when I return. The cliché that you learn so much about yourself and your home country is true.

The purpose of this booklet is to enhance your overseas experience by offering information that will help you prepare for it thoughtfully. It addresses basic questions you should consider before departure and while you are away in order to get the most out of your international experience. We hope you will use it as a starting point for considering the adventures that lie ahead. Whether it's your first trip abroad or your fourteenth, we hope its rewards will be beyond your wildest dreams.

Basic Preparation

Foreign travel is a rich and rewarding experience. You will learn extraordinary things about other people and places, and a great deal about yourself. But successful journeys do not happen by themselves. Careful planning is essential before departure. Take the time to think your trip through carefully, to learn as much as you can about your destination, and to approach potential problems and hazards with sensible precautions and a healthy mindset. A week-long visit to Cameroon, a six-month trip through England, and a year-long stay in Argentina prompt different questions and varying degrees of preparation and research. However, all of these experiences will take you

away from the familiar and present you with challenges; no matter what the specific circumstances may be, you need to be ready. Common sense should be your guide as you plan and when you travel abroad, just as it would be in the routines of your daily life and travels at home.

Basic preparation includes investing the time to

- research the places and cultures you will visit and keep track of regional current events;
- learn about health and safety requirements specific to your destination and issues related to culture shock and cultural difference;
- select and purchase adequate health insurance for your specific travel needs;
- determine what travel documents you will need during your travels;
- investigate the cost of living, estimate your expenses, create a budget, and determine how you will handle your money during your time away; and
- make a plan for keeping in touch with family and other contacts at home.

This booklet provides information about each of these areas that will help you to prepare for your international experience.

Adjusting to Life Abroad

Culture Shock

Many, if not most, of the basic beliefs that shape our lives and make us who we are as individuals are culturally rooted. Views about time and space, social interaction, and behavior accepted in and defined by our own home environments may be challenged by a different set of beliefs when we spend time in another culture. This causes a “shock” to our accepted ways of thinking and results in disquieting feelings of uncertainty, confusion, and frustration. Culture shock can be mild or severe, depending on many factors, including your previous experience in or familiarity with the host culture, the extent of similarities or differences between your home culture and the new culture, your personal flexibility and tolerance for change, the length of your visit, and the amount of social interaction and contact you will have with local people during your stay. Discovering where your transcultural

comfort zone lies, and how and when to modify your “normal” behavior, can sometimes be a difficult process. But, the rewards of working through culture shock – that is, trying to become familiar with the strange – are great; the process stretches your faculties and expands your comprehension of the world.

It is rare for travelers who immerse themselves in local life to experience no culture shock at all. For some, the initial exhilaration of being someplace new and different may postpone the onset of culture shock symptoms for a time. Others step off the plane and immediately feel disoriented, a little frightened, and somewhat lonely. At the same time, travelers may experience challenges in maintaining relationships with family and others at home, creating feelings of uncertainty. Whatever your particular situation, at some stage, the cultural differences that you experience will probably lead you to feel “out of place.” Being immersed in a new environment and away from those who understand and care most about you, it is natural that you would have such feelings, and you should not be alarmed by them.

Rather, understanding the nature and realities of culture shock before you go means that you will not be surprised by them and can take steps to manage your transition with confidence. Generally speaking, culture shock has four stages: (1) initial euphoria in new surroundings as you eagerly explore your new environment; (2) decreased energy and increased frustration as you routinely encounter and try to negotiate differences; (3) more relaxed and comfortable attitudes as you settle into local customs and norms; and (4) conflicting emotions of anticipation and sadness as you contemplate returning home and leaving your “new” culture behind.

Before you go, invest some time in reading about culture shock. (Check the Resources section of this booklet for suggested titles.) Talk to people who have been through the experience, especially those who have spent time in your destination. While you’re away, the most important thing you can do to facilitate adjustment is to avoid isolating yourself from others, even though you may feel tired or would prefer to be alone. Nurture supportive relationships with local people that will allow you to learn about your new environment. Occasionally, it is helpful to talk with compatriots about what you are going through and the difficulties of understanding new ways of thinking and acting. Try not to judge

situations or people too quickly or without appropriate information; remember, things are different, not wrong.

As you learn more about your host country, develop relationships, and establish a routine of life abroad, you will begin to feel more comfortable. Recognize and respect your own tolerance for change, and, above all, remember that cultural adjustment takes time.

Reentry Adjustment

You can take precautionary measures and manage culture shock effectively when it strikes abroad. Perhaps more surprising, though, is the fact that culture shock may hit you just as hard – or even harder – when you return. In many ways this is a natural reaction. You will have changed personally, you will see your home country from a new perspective, and people, relationships, and circumstances may also have changed at home while you have been away. Consequently, it will take some time to readjust, even though you are returning to familiar surroundings. Give yourself plenty of time to reacquaint yourself with your family, friends, and routines. And remember to employ all of the strategies that you used when going abroad to deal with cultural change, including keeping an open mind, remaining flexible, and seeking support from others, particularly those who have also returned from abroad.

In addition to the emotional aspects of reentry, there are also practical considerations to keep in mind. Some people plan an international experience in the period between the end of one important activity and the start of another, such as a leave of absence between the junior and senior years, graduation and the beginning of graduate school or a new job, or the end of one employment situation and the start of another. It is not advisable to leave all of your preparation for your next activity until you are home again. Before you go, try to anticipate information you may need on your return – for example, impending application deadlines and test dates, required documents, potential reference requests, and housing needs. Figure out what you can get done ahead of time, what can be done from abroad, and what can wait until you get back. If possible, stay connected with individuals who can help while you are gone. Do *not* expect that they will do your work for you, just because you are away, but *do* check in periodically and ask questions if you need advice and guidance.

Women's Concerns

Adapting to and living in new cultures is a challenging, yet crucial part of any international experience. This is particularly true for women, as attitudes towards and treatment of women vary widely around the world. If you are a woman traveling abroad, you may occasionally find it difficult to adjust to these unfamiliar standards. You may take offense at certain behaviors, such as unwanted attention, or feel limited in your mobility or independence because of different norms for women's conduct. These differences can be frustrating at times, yet understanding them is an important part of comprehending the much larger cultural and social fabric of your destination. It is often very helpful for women to seek support from other women (and from men, too) who have had similar experiences by talking about these issues and sharing strategies for dealing with them before you go and while you are away.

While gender issues are intimately tied to cultural norms, it is important for women to consider the distinctions between cultural difference and sexual harassment, which can arise anywhere. If you are having difficulty making those distinctions, are uncomfortable in any way with your treatment, or are being sexually harassed, you should seek appropriate advice and assistance right away. Don't hesitate to discuss your concerns with a trusted friend, colleague, mentor, program sponsor, or OCS adviser. Do not ignore these matters; they are serious and can affect your confidence, decision making, and personal safety. You are always welcome to discuss these issues with members of the OCS staff and other students as part of preparation for travel. Check the Resources section of this guide for further reading.

Race and Ethnicity Concerns

The very meaning of race and ethnicity varies dramatically from country to country, as does the role and importance of ethnic or racial identity in daily life, both on the national and individual level. Anyone is a potential racial or ethnic minority member in another country, and because of this, many travelers have concerns about how they will be perceived and treated overseas.

One of the best ways to prepare yourself is to learn as much as you

can ahead of time about the current events, customs, history, mores, and values of your destination before you go. This information can provide you with valuable insights into complex and sometimes perplexing social attitudes and can help you to anticipate and ready yourself for both the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural encounter. You need to have a realistic understanding of what may be ahead of you when you study, work, live, or travel abroad and the importance of prior preparation cannot be underestimated.

Remember, however, that it is not necessary to tolerate truly disrespectful or dangerous behavior in any location. Don't abandon the rules of civility or the sense you have of your level of comfort because you are far from home. In most situations, you can hold firm to your internal understanding of personal safety and respect while adjusting your perspective on and expectations for good interpersonal relations in your new environment.

OCS is eager to discuss any concerns that you might have and also to put you in touch with other students who have previous experience in the country in which you will be living. If you are participating in a study abroad or fellowship program, its administrators will also be an excellent source of information, advice, and support; don't hesitate to ask questions and express concerns at any time. Check the Resources section of this booklet for suggested reading.

Concerns of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered Students

Attitudes and laws relating to sexual orientation vary throughout the world. It is important to know the laws and mores of the country in which you will be studying, since there can be serious penalties associated with their violation overseas. However, you should never be expected to accept violent or personally abusive behavior in any location because of your sexual orientation. The best course of action is to inform yourself before you go. Talk to individuals who have spent time in your destination and utilize BGLT travelers' groups to get advice and answers to your questions. Before departure and while you are away, don't hesitate to share your concerns with OCS. In addition, you may wish to seek guidance from your study program, fellowships sponsor, friends, colleagues, or mentors. For further resources for BGLT travelers, consult this booklet's Resources section.

Health and Safety Abroad

Protecting your health and traveling safely are probably the most important ingredients of a successful international experience. Even the most seasoned world traveler takes precautionary and preventive measures whenever possible. Apart from basic health concerns, safe travel is largely a question of using common sense; it is important to continue to practice what you know to be prudent, wise, and safe behavior when you are away. However, common sense is not always enough in international settings. Being as knowledgeable as you can be about the country or region in which you will be living or traveling *before you go* is the best way to prepare yourself.

Give safety issues adequate forethought (“What would I do if...”). Be aware of local social and political conditions to be sure that you don’t end up in an unexpected and potentially dangerous situation. Use common sense to protect your person and possessions, and be as knowledgeable as you can about your traveling companions and chance acquaintances. Know the laws of your host country and respect and abide by them. Don’t be paranoid, but don’t be foolish either. At any time, but especially when in doubt, contact your destination country’s local embassy or consulate for assistance. Check the U.S. State Department’s Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings at www.travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html for the most up-to-date information about travel conditions in your host country and those countries that you may plan to visit.

Before you go, we highly recommend that you read pertinent material in the books listed in the Resources section of this handbook, all of which are available in the OCS Reading Room, and consult other sources such as newspapers, magazines, and the Internet.

Insurance

Medical insurance is essential to your health and well-being overseas. Don’t go abroad without researching and purchasing a good health insurance policy. You, or you and your family, should choose a policy that provides adequate and appropriate coverage for your individual needs and specific destination.

Students usually choose one of two options: Harvard student health insurance or a plan outside of Harvard. For more information about the Harvard plan, contact the Harvard Insurance Office (495-2008). If you are not a student, your only option is to investigate personal health insurance policies through private insurers. Contact the appropriate insurance agents to learn the specifics about international coverage. Harvard does not provide information about insurance policies or make recommendations about particular companies.

There are important considerations to keep in mind when assessing insurance plans. First, you need to find out if the insurance plan will cover health care overseas (some do not). In addition, be sure to inquire about the extent of coverage, including the specific types of illness, injury, and service covered; the method of payment and reimbursement for medical expenses; and the cost of the plan. You may also want to know about additional types of insurance. For example, emergency evacuation insurance pays the cost of moving a sick or injured person to a hospital where appropriate medical care can be provided when it cannot be provided locally. And repatriation insurance covers the return of mortal remains from abroad. Finally, you may want to consider personal accident, baggage loss, and trip cancellation insurance.

Your choice of company and types of coverage should be based on your individual health needs and expectations for adequate coverage, as well as the types and availability of health care in your destination. These factors will help you choose a coverage package in which you can have confidence.

Inoculations and Preventive Health Measures

Be sure that you inquire carefully about inoculations and preventive health measures prior to your departure. For questions concerning inoculations and disease prevention and control, talk with your own physician; if your doctor doesn't know the answers to all your questions, get a referral to someone who does. You may also want to consult with specialists in travel health at Harvard University Health Services. Also, check with the Centers for Disease Control, which now provides travelers' health information on-line at www.cdc.gov/travel. This site outlines vaccine requirements and recommendations, malaria risk and drug information, food and water precautions, disease

outbreak information, and other prevention information for travelers to all regions of the world.

Research local standards, conditions, and availability of medical care and hospitals. Your doctor and the embassy or consulate of the country you will be visiting can help you obtain this information. If you are visiting an area where dysentery or other intestinal disorders are common, find out which precautions are appropriate and which treatments you may want to take with you. Learn as much as you can about food production and preparation and the drinking-water supply in the places you plan to visit. You may need to alter your diet according to what you learn. If you will require special injections or hospital treatments while you are away, inquire before you go about local standards for these medical procedures and talk to your doctor about developing a plan for care.

If you are currently on medication or are under a doctor's care for a specific medical condition or disability, be sure to discuss with your caregiver(s) what you need to do to maintain good health while you are away. It is very important that you have these arrangements in place before you go. If you have to travel with prescription medications or medical supplies, such as syringes, carry them in your carry-on luggage. Keep all medicines, including over-the-counter medicines, in their original labeled containers to make customs processing easier. Take copies of prescriptions, and if any medicines contain narcotics, carry a notarized letter from your physician attesting to your need to take them. Pack an extra set of eyeglasses or contact lenses, if you wear them. And depending on your destination, you may also wish to carry extra contact lens care products with you. The organization, Mobility International USA, can help students with questions regarding medical disabilities; information can be found at www.miusa.org.

If you are studying abroad, you should discuss your needs with your study abroad sponsor or administrators at your overseas university. These individuals can provide support during your stay and a smooth transition into your new environment.

As a general precaution, take care of yourself while you are away. Don't wear yourself down, avoid undue stress and excessive exposure to heat or cold, drink plenty of fluids, eat and drink carefully, and get plenty of rest.

Local Laws and Customs and Your Behavior

Be sure that your actions abroad with regard to personal comportment, sex, alcohol, or drugs are appropriate with respect to the local culture and laws and your own health and welfare. As a foreigner abroad, you are subject to the laws of the country in which you are traveling and are not protected by the laws or judicial procedures of your home country. This covers everything from visas to drug laws to currency exchanges to dress codes. Laws regarding drug possession (including possession of small amounts of marijuana or cocaine), drunk driving, and contraband activity in most foreign countries are rigorously enforced, and penalties for violations are usually severe, including prison sentences. Some more serious infractions may even be considered capital offenses. Deal only with official agents to exchange money, buy travel tickets, or purchase souvenirs, and adhere to local laws about selling personal effects such as clothing and jewelry. Avoid black market transactions at all times. In many countries, you should not photograph police and military personnel or installations, border areas, and transportation facilities.

As a visitor, your natural behavior and appearance will probably make you conspicuous nearly everywhere you go because they will most likely be different from those of local people. As much as you can, keep a low profile. Dress and behave conservatively, and interact in ways consistent with the culture and mindful of your position as a visitor. Avoid dress, jewelry, luggage, rental cars, or behavior that would draw attention to you as a potentially important or wealthy foreigner. Most importantly, be respectful with those you meet. Avoid loud conversations and arguments in public, and any behavior that might appear overbearing or antagonistic. You are responsible for knowing the cultural norms governing dress and behavior in your destination, so it is wise to educate yourself beforehand and to be observant and respectful during your stay.

Reducing the Risk of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

It is prudent to learn about and consider the risk of STDs and AIDS as you plan your international travels. Individuals everywhere have very different beliefs and behaviors regarding sexual activity, drug use, and alcohol. We urge you to consider carefully your own views in light of

the laws and health issues that prevail in your destination. Always act in the interest of your personal safety.

Keeping Alert

One of the most exciting aspects of travel is getting to know new people and places. At the same time, as a traveler, you naturally face some level of risk in unfamiliar surroundings. Your best defense against potential danger is to keep alert and use common sense.

Ask questions about safety in the areas in which you will be living and traveling to avoid unknowingly putting yourself in harm's way. Heed local warnings about dangerous neighborhoods or areas to avoid; be alert and keep a low profile in crowded places like airports, public transportation, and markets; and take precautions to protect yourself and your belongings when walking or sightseeing. When staying in a hotel, don't admit strangers to your room without proper identification; keep your door locked at all times. Try not to travel alone at night; it's also a good idea to let someone know of your plans and when you expect to return. And be careful of sharing information like your address or itinerary with people you don't know or overly friendly strangers. Do not let others handle your luggage; keep it locked when walking on the street and when you leave your residence. Do not carry packages or baggage for people you do not know well.

If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, err on the side of caution. You might want to write down or memorize essential emergency numbers, and know whom to call in a given emergency.

Vehicle Safety

Traveling by car in another country can be a convenient way to get around, but it can also be very dangerous for foreigners who do not have experience with or a firm understanding of the local official and "unofficial" rules of the road. Speed limits, levels of congestion, traffic patterns, road conditions, or left- or right-hand driving in your new surroundings may be unfamiliar and confusing to you, and may compromise your ability to negotiate the road. Before you decide to drive, consider carefully whether you have the necessary skills to do so safely. Get advice from local people about driving conditions and traffic regulations.

If you choose to drive, make sure that you understand local laws and traffic signs before you set out. Make sure you have the necessary international documents or license to drive legally. Drive with a good local map and know your route beforehand. Never pick up hitchhikers. In crowded streets, drive with your car doors locked and windows closed. If you park on the street, choose a well-lit area and take any valuables with you.

Precautions against Terrorism

According to the U.S. Department of State, terrorist attacks typically occur in a random, unpredictable fashion. Your best protection is to avoid unsafe areas or areas with a record of recent terrorism altogether. If you must travel to such areas, don't go into the situation without giving your actions careful thought. Find out as much as you can about the nature of the violence and what reasonable precautions you can take to minimize risk to your personal safety. The U.S. Department of State is an excellent source of up-to-date information and advice. Take their warnings seriously and do not downplay the potential for risk; you must keep alert during your stay so that you can make good judgments about sensible behavior.

Tourists are not usually the target of terrorism but sometimes are conspicuous for their relative wealth and privilege. Maintain a low profile during your stay and avoid active involvement in local controversies. Keep alert in airports and crowds and be cautious about what you discuss with strangers, being aware that you may be overheard by others. Discuss emergency plans with your family, and register with your home embassy upon arrival. Keep the embassy and your family or other contact people informed if you make any changes in your itinerary.

Government Assistance Abroad

Foreign embassies and consulates exist to provide assistance to their citizens abroad, including information about current social and political events, climate, health and safety concerns, and educational and cultural affairs. We encourage you to register with your nearest embassy or consulate on arrival. This will make it easier for you to be contacted should an emergency arise or in the unlikely event that

citizens need to be evacuated. If your passport or other travel documents are lost or stolen, report this fact to the nearest embassy or consulate immediately so that they can be replaced as soon as possible.

If you are traveling around or through a country, and particularly if you are traveling independently, you may want to leave a copy of your itinerary with officials at the nearest embassy or consulate so that they know of your whereabouts. You should then notify that embassy or consulate when you return from your trip.

If you run out of money overseas, embassy or consular officials can help you get in touch with your family, friends, bank, or employer. If you find yourself in legal difficulties abroad, contact your nearest embassy or consulate. While consular officers cannot act as attorneys, they can help you get in touch with people at home, provide assistance and information about local laws, and try to make sure that you are treated humanely under international conventions.

U.S. citizens can find out the location of the embassy or consulate in their host countries through the web site *www.state.gov*. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their nearest embassy or consulate in the U.S. to find out what services will be available to them while abroad. All foreign embassies in Washington, D.C., are listed on the web site *www.embassies.org*.

Money Matters

Having a well-thought-out plan about money matters will help you feel more secure while you are away from home. Your first step is to find out the cost of living in your destination. With this information you can estimate your expenses and create a budget for your trip. The best sources of information about cost of living are people who live in or who have just visited your destination. These can include fellow students, Harvard alumni/ae, faculty, study abroad program and fellowship sponsors, internship mentors, employers, friends, and family members. Travel guide books and web sites can also provide helpful information. See the Resources section for references.

When you have estimated your expenses and created a budget, consider carefully how you want to handle your money during your time away so that it will be both available to you and secure. The most important consideration is to have multiple ways to access it. Then, if unexpected problems arise, you'll have several methods to access cash or credit when you need it. Consult bank representatives, travel guides, study abroad program sponsors, family members, and friends who have traveled to your destination, or your host abroad for suggestions about money matters. The following are some of the most common ways of handling finances:

Traveler's checks are one of the safest ways to carry money. Traveler's checks can be redeemed almost anywhere in local currency. If lost, they can be replaced, provided you have the proper documentation. Remember to countersign and date traveler's checks only in the presence of the person who will cash them, and as you cash them, keep a tally of those that remain unredeemed.

Traveler's checks can be purchased in U.S. dollars or in other major currencies. The advantage of buying traveler's checks in the currency of the country in which you will be traveling is that you will pay only one commission charge at the time of purchase. The disadvantage is that exchange rates may fluctuate during your time abroad, and so you cannot be certain of the ultimate value of your checks in local currency with respect to their original purchase price.

ATM cards are increasingly easy to use overseas since there are now several worldwide ATM networks (for example, CIRRUS). By using an ATM card, you can access your home bank account and receive money in the local currency. Before departure, make sure that your ATM card is part of a worldwide network and ask your bank for a list of ATM machine locations where you will be able to access your money. Some cards also require a separate international PIN (personal identification number); check with your bank to ensure that you have the appropriate PIN. Be sure to find out if your bank will charge a transaction fee for using your ATM card internationally.

Credit cards can also be a useful way to manage your money and can be very helpful in emergencies. In many countries, though not all, you can use credit cards for purchases and cash advances. Credit cards often provide a good exchange rate on purchases because there is

usually no commission charge. However, there can be hefty service charges if you use your card for cash advances. **Take only essential credit cards with you.** Find out from your credit card companies what your credit limits are and abide by them; there may be financial and legal consequences for charging over those amounts on your trip.

If you are planning to use a credit card during your travels, find out if it is an accepted form of currency in the countries you plan to visit. Whenever you use a credit card, make sure that your card is returned to you and the carbon sheets of the transaction are destroyed. Also, don't forget to make arrangements to pay your monthly credit card bills while you are away.

Establishing a local bank account may be possible, depending on the policies of your host country and the duration of your stay. If you can open an account, funds from home can be transferred to it by wiring or other methods. For a short-term stay, establishing an account may not be necessary or possible.

Passports, Visas, and Official Travel Documents

It is critical that you have all of the appropriate legal documentation required for your trip prior to departure. Be aware that both passports and visas can take up to eight weeks to process, and longer in some countries. Be sure to allow plenty of time to arrange your documents. Don't wait for your passport or visa to arrive just days before your plane is scheduled to depart!

A passport is an official identification document issued by a government to its own citizens, and it is essential for international travel nearly everywhere in the world. U.S. citizens can apply for passports through the State Department; applications are available at the Cambridge Post Office on Mt. Auburn Street and at the Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Federal Building on Causeway Street in Boston. Passport applications and other important travel links are also available on-line through the State Department's web site at www.travel.state.gov. Non-U.S. citizens can obtain information about passports from their nearest embassy or consulate in the U.S.

If you need a visa for your destination, obtain it from your host country's embassy or consulate before you leave. See the blue pages of the phone book for the embassy or consulate nearest you or the *Foreign Representatives Yellow Book* (Section L of the OCS Reading Room). You can also get information about travel and study in a specific country by checking its embassy's web site at www.embassy.org.

International driver's licenses, student identity cards, and health insurance identification cards (with policy information) are some of the other documents you may wish to obtain before leaving. It is also a good idea to travel with extra passport-size photos – you may need them for local police or university identity cards or public transportation passes once you are abroad. Make photocopies of your airline tickets, passport identification page, driver's license, credit cards, international student identity card, and traveler's checks numbers. Leave one set at home, and keep another set with you in a place separate from the items themselves. These photocopies will be invaluable in obtaining new documents if the originals are lost or stolen.

Communication

You will naturally want to stay in touch with your family and friends and the Harvard community while you are abroad. However, your access to and methods of communication may be different than what you are used to at home.

Computers and E-Mail

You should not necessarily expect to have computer or e-mail access while you are away. If access is available, through a study abroad program, university, business, cyber café, or local acquaintance, you may be able to gain access to your e-mail account by telnet or through web-based providers such as Hotmail or Yahoo or others available at your location. You should expect that access may be limited or expensive, or both.

Laptops

Given the likelihood that overseas access to computers will be limited, you may consider taking a laptop computer with you. In some locations, a laptop gives you greater flexibility by enabling you to avoid a long wait to use one of a small number of computers and to set your own schedule for checking and sending e-mail or completing assignments. However, you should also consider the practicalities of bringing such equipment. In places where electrical power is expensive or irregular, or where hook-ups for power are scarce, a laptop could be a burden or impractical. There is also the question of security; laptop theft is common from hotels, dorm rooms, work places, libraries, trains, and even airports at security scanners.

If you decide to take a laptop computer, find out about differences in the electric current in other countries, and the effect they can have on the power source for laptop computers. Check with a reputable dealer to determine if your computer's power supply can be converted for use in the country in which you will be living. Find out if you will have access to facilities (e.g., printers and sockets) that will allow you to use your laptop. We also recommend that you insure your laptop before you take it abroad and, if possible, register it with customs before you leave home.

Telephones

Depending on the country, you may also experience more limited access to telephone service than you are used to. You may be in a region where few people own telephones or where service is intermittent. In some countries, owning and operating a telephone is extremely expensive, so its use is limited to short, necessary calls. Norms for telephone etiquette also vary. It is important to heed cultural cues about telephone availability and use and to act accordingly.

Phone your family and friends at pre-arranged times or have them phone you. If you are communicating with the U.S., it is generally less expensive to call from the U.S. than it is to make a call to the U.S. from abroad. Be sure to obtain dialing instructions for international calling, in particular obtaining the necessary codes to reach operators from countries overseas. You may also wish to investigate the feasibility and cost of using a calling card. Phone service providers such as AT&T and Sprint offer special international cards that may be conve-

nient and economical, depending on your destination. Finally, you may want to research cell phone use in your destination to determine if a cell phone is an available and efficient way to communicate in-country and internationally.

A Final Word

When your preparations are complete and you are waiting to board the plane, train, or ship that will mark the start of your adventure, take a moment to reflect on the goals you have set for your time away. They are the reasons that you have invested so much time and energy in planning your journey carefully and well. We hope that you have a safe trip and a pleasant sojourn in your destination and return home – wherever that may be – having fulfilled those goals and many more. Have a wonderful time!

Resources

There are many resources in the OCS Reading Room dealing with travel and culture in other countries and regions that may be of interest to you. Be certain to explore local bookstores to see what else you can find. Take time to read newspapers from the city or country where you will be living to get an understanding of current affairs and important issues. The more knowledge and understanding you have before you go, the more successful your trip will be.

There are also helpful resources on the Internet. Check the “Travel” section of the International Experience Program area on the OCS Home Page at www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu/~fasocs/IEP/travel/index.htm for links to an array of useful web sites.

The following are resources available in the OCS Reading Room that will help you prepare for your study abroad experience. We encourage you to read through all materials relevant to your particular destination.

OCS has an extensive collection of Let’s Go travel guides, which are listed under the appropriate region below. Let’s Go guides are written by Harvard students and are an excellent source of information on sightseeing and budget traveling.

General

Going Places: The High School Student's Guide to Study, Travel, and Adventure Abroad, Max Terry, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

This book, updated annually, is geared to high school students, but its contents are equally applicable to college students planning to travel. It contains basic information on programs abroad, travel preparation, and the learning experience inherent in foreign travel. The book also contains interviews with returned travelers.

“Health-Related Travel Hints.” This binder contains a set of pamphlets from health specialists addressing various health concerns before and during overseas travel. The pamphlets include *International Health Care Traveler's Guide*, *Health Hints for the Tropics*, *Staying Healthy in the Tropics*, *World Immunization Chart*, and *AIDS and International Travel*.

International Travel Health Guide, Rose Stuart, Travel Medicine, Inc., Northampton, MA, 1994.

This is a very useful and informative book containing general information on such topics as pre-departure medical checklist, jet lag, water and food precautions abroad, insect and sexually transmitted diseases, altitude sickness, and medical care and travel insurance while abroad. It also has country-specific information for most countries around the world including whether HIV-testing is required for entry and information on American/western-trained or oriented hospitals, clinics, and doctors. Be sure to read the section about the country in which you will be studying.

The Safe Travel Book, Peter Savage, Lexington Books, New York, NY, 1993.

This useful book covers all of the basics: documents, health, travel plans, travel safety, what to take, personal security, terrorism, going home. Although general, it offers some very helpful hints and guidelines to help you make your journey a safe one.

Staying Healthy in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Dirk Schroder, Volunteers in Asia, Stanford, CA, 1988.

In addition to some excellent general information, this book offers more specific information on particular infections and diseases, including how to recognize, avoid, and treat them. It also provides

good basic first-aid information. It is a small, pocket-size book that might be worth taking with you.

Women's Guide to Overseas Living, Nancy J. Piet-Pelon and Barbara Hornby, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME, 1992.

While portions of this book may be irrelevant for the student's experience, it does offer some good basic guidance on the topics of culture shock, adjustments for living abroad, and reentry. While written from a woman's perspective, it is useful for anyone.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Let's Go South Africa, Lindiwe Dovey, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland: The Rough Guide, Barbara McCrea, Tony Pinchuck and Greg Salter-Mthembe, The Rough Guides, London, 1997.

Both of the above are very good, basic travel guides with historical and cultural summaries, important travel facts, and useful information on getting around, where to stay, and what to see.

North Africa and the Middle East

Let's Go Israel, Laura Weinrib, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Middle East, Zahr Said, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Turkey, Meredith Quinn, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Asia

Let's Go China, Megan Frederickson, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go India and Nepal, Christiana King, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Southeast Asia, Peter Richards, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

China: The Rough Guide, Jeremy Atiyah, David Leffman and Simon Lewis, The Rough Guides, London, UK, 1997.

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei: The Rough Guide, Charles de Ladesma, Mark Lewis, Pauline Savage, The Rough Guides, London, UK, 1997.

Europe

Let's Go Austria and Switzerland, Julie Allen, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Britain and Ireland, Daryl Sng, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Eastern Europe, Melissa Gibson, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Europe, Kate McCarthy, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go France, Daryush Jonathan Dawid, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Germany, Max Hirsh, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Greece, Peter Constantine, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Italy, J. Marshall Henshaw, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go London, Laura Beth Bugg Deason, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Paris, Anna Schneider-Mayerson, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Rome, Christina Svendsen, Daniel Beraca Visel, eds., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Spain and Portugal, Olivia Lorilland Cowley, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

England: The Rough Guide, Dave Abrams, Rob Andrews, Jules Brown and Rob Humphreys, The Rough Guides, London, UK, 1998.

Spain: The Rough Guide, Mark Ellingham, John Fisher, The Rough Guides, London, UK, 1997.

Culture Shock: Britain, Terry Tan, Graphic Arts Center Publishing, Portland, OR, 1995.

From beer to TV, we've all been exposed to the culture of this island country, but often forget what a different culture it is from that of the U.S. This book will help give you some background and a better feel for what it is to be culturally British.

European Customs and Manners, Nancy Braganti and Elizabeth Devine, Meadowbrook Press, New York, NY, 1992.

This work offers a country-by-country discussion of some of the basic behavioral norms in Europe's different cultures, from greeting to eating and things in between.

From Nyet to Da: Understanding the Russians, Yale Richmond, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME, 1992.

This book offers informative reading for anyone planning a stay in Russia, covering a range of topics from personal relationships to business negotiations to a basic understanding of Russian politics and society.

Jobs in Russia and the Newly Independent States, Moira Forbes, Impact Publications, Manassas Park, VA, 1994.

This book provides historical information about Russia and the newly independent states. It also provides information and resources for employment opportunities in the region and general tips for traveling and living in Russia and the NIS.

Living and Working in Britain, David Hampshire, Survival Books, Haslemere, UK, 1991.

From finding work to working conditions to housing to using the phone, this is an excellent introduction to the basics of living and working in the UK. Want to know how cricket is played? Or how to use the National Health System? This book will give you some of the answers to the important questions about living in England.

Russia Business Survival Guide, Paul Richardson, Russian Information Services, Montpelier, VT, 1992.

For the cultural as well as business traveler, this guide offers a wealth of useful information on getting around and conducting business (professional or personal) in Russia. From rubles to Svyazi, this book will prove helpful and informative.

Studying and Working in France, Russell Cousins et al., Manchester University Press, Manchester, UK, 1994.

Much of this book is directed towards the study experience in French universities. However, it also has a considerable amount of more general and useful cultural information.

Latin America

Let's Go Central America, James Gardner, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Mexico, Arthur Koski-Karell, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Let's Go Peru and Ecuador, Rolan Solis-Hernandez, ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2000.

Intercultural Press

If you can't find the following books in libraries, you may purchase them by writing directly to Intercultural Press, P.O. Box 768, Yarmouth, ME 04096. Be certain to inquire about current prices and postage charges.

International Communication: A Reader, edited by Larry Samovar and Richard Porter. This book is a collection of articles and studies on verbal and nonverbal intercultural communication.

Survival Kit for Overseas Living, by L. Robert Kohls. This book discusses various aspects of adjusting to life overseas, including culture shock.

In addition to these books, Intercultural Press publishes other guides to help Americans understand many specific cultures better. These include *A Common Core (Thailand/U.S.)*, *Considering Filipinos*, *Encountering the Chinese*, *A Fair Go for All (Australia/U.S.)*, *From Nyet to Da: Understanding the Russians*, *Good Neighbors (Mexico/U.S.)*, *Spain is Different*, *Understanding Arabs*, and *With Respect to the Japanese*.

Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered Travelers

The following are web sites offering information for BGLT travelers:
www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/biblio.html
www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/links.html

For more information as you prepare for travel, you may wish to consult:

U.S. Department of State Citizens Emergency Center
Consular Information Sheets (from the State Department)
Foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. and overseas
U.S. embassies and consulates in foreign capitals
International organizations
Travel agents
Insurance carriers
Recent travelers to your destinations
Guidebooks and travelogues
Foreign students and scholars at Harvard
Harvard departments and research centers
The University Health Services
Harvard libraries
OCS Counselors and the OCS Reading Room
Overseas advisers and Harvard Clubs abroad
Alumni living overseas

Checklists

Destination Research Checklist

One of the best ways to get the most out of your experience abroad is to become knowledgeable beforehand about your destination. You should be able to answer each of the following questions before you go. The Resources section in this guide can help in your research.

_____ What is the country's history? What is the current form of government and the present political and economic situation in the country?

_____ Who is the current leader/ruler and when and how did he/she come to power?

_____ What was the biggest headline in the news there in the past year?

_____ Has there been a major national crisis recently? If so, when did it occur and what was it about?

_____ What is the most likely health problem you could encounter?

_____ What will be one of the biggest cultural adjustments you'll have to make?

_____ What aspect of your typical behavior at home might be inappropriate there? What are the local customs, mores, and modes of behavior?

_____ What is the most extreme weather you might encounter?

_____ How do most people travel around your host country?

_____ What languages are spoken in the country?

_____ What religious, ethnic, and/or cultural groups are represented? Are there conflicts among them?

_____ Where is your nearest home embassy or consulate located, in case you need assistance?

_____ What is the current situation for travelers? Are there areas of the country you should avoid for security or health reasons?

Travel Checklist

The following is a list of essential steps in preparing for departure. You will also add to this list your own set of important “to do” activities.

_____ **Get your travel documents in order.**

_____ **Plan your budget and strategies for handling your money.**

_____ **Purchase airplane tickets, rail passes, youth hostel cards, etc.**

_____ **Investigate medical insurance coverage and consider additional insurance; purchase the most appropriate policy.**

_____ **Arrange for an international calling card and identify methods of keeping in touch with family and friends.**

_____ **Inform yourself about health and safety issues and discuss them with your family.**

_____ **Make an appointment with a physician to discuss health matters related to going abroad and preventative measures you may need to take before your departure or during your stay overseas.**

_____ **Anticipate culture shock and return culture shock.**

