
Newbies Guide to Studying Abroad

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Sometimes, the process of planning to study abroad can seem overwhelming and too much of a hassle to be worth it. It's easy to picture yourself sitting at a café in Paris or practicing your Mandarin with the locals in Taiwan, but once you actually decide that you want to go, everything gets complicated.

The best way to get started is to visit your school's Study Abroad office. Here you'll have the opportunity to talk to an advisor and ask questions about what programs are available and what's required. The office will have materials on each program and can go over the process it takes to study abroad.

Before you do, however, there are questions you need to ask yourself so that you have an idea of what to expect.

Getting Started with Study Abroad

Why do you want to study abroad?

It's important to note that there are many reasons to study abroad. Sure, you might be looking for a specialized program at a foreign university because it will enhance your education, but studying abroad offers countless other reasons to break the routine of your life ranging from learning a new language to developing a cross-cultural understanding to simply wanting an adventure. Deciding why you want to go abroad will help you plan your perfect experience. Maybe you want to improve your French by studying abroad in France, or get to know the Japanese culture by studying in Japan. Whatever the reason, knowing what you want to get out of the experience beforehand will lead to a successful and rewarding time abroad.

What kinds of programs are available?

There are multiple types of programs to choose from. Most students opt to study abroad during the school year, either for a semester or for the entire year, but you can also choose to go during the summer. Going during the summer is a great option for people who are worried about graduating on time. Check to see which programs offer you the ability to stay for a year after you go for a semester—you will want to have the option! After you figure out when you want to study abroad, think about whether you want to take classes in English or in another language. There are tons of programs for each; you can enroll in classes that are taught in English or in a language-intensive course where you will completely immerse yourself in a new language. You can also decide whether you want to live with students in provided housing, live on your own, or live with a host family.

What do I need to plan?

As soon as you decide you want to study abroad, you need to sit down with an advisor and figure out:

- Do you qualify?

There are often minimum GPA requirements for study abroad programs and sometimes minimum language foreign language proficiency requirements. In addition, work with your advisor to see if you have the right amount of units to go abroad; there might be a unit ceiling at your university.

- When to apply

Most students study abroad during their sophomore or junior year. In most cases, you will need to apply months in advance to study abroad. Figure out when the deadline to apply is and map out how you are going to complete your application. You might need to write an essay or include letters of reference, so leave yourself a substantial amount of time to get everything in on time.

- Graduating on time

Most students want to graduate on time. The earlier you start planning, the better.

- How to pay for it

There are tons of ways to lessen the cost of studying abroad. The research can be overwhelming, but if you start early, it can save you a lot. Aid is available from a variety of sources.

Paying for Study Abroad

You can get financial help from a number of sources:

- Financial Aid ' If you choose a program endorsed by your school and are qualified to get government aid, you can get financial aid for your study abroad experience. Go to the website and look around.
- Government Loans ' Check out federal loans: Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, and Parent PLUS loans.
- Scholarships ' There are several scholarships that you may be eligible for: David L. Boren Undergraduate Scholarships for Study Abroad, a Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship. Plan ahead because you don't want to miss the deadlines for these scholarships!
- Grants ' Research to see if you are eligible for a federal Pell Grant or The Federal Supplemental Education Opportunities Grant.
- Private funding ' Look for private scholarships like the Freeman Awards. Companies like Go! Overseas offer scholarships every year.
- Program discounts ' Many study abroad programs like API, CIEE, and Panrimo have discounts or scholarships available to students. When you choose a program, make sure that you check for these opportunities.

Studying abroad is an incredible opportunity that should not be passed up by college students. The bottom line for those considering studying abroad is this: start planning early!

