Don’t be fooled! Going abroad isn’t as hard as most people imagine — and the rewards last a lifetime.

As a student, you’ve got a lot on your plate. Coursework, extra-curriculars, personal relationships and other obligations can pile up quickly (not to mention the all-consuming process of figuring out who you are and what you want in life). It’s normal to feel a bit overwhelmed during this time and adding an international program can seem like an extra challenge. But no matter what barriers you perceive, it’s possible to make it happen!

Before Anything, Recognize the Value of Going Abroad

The positive impact of traveling abroad during school cannot be overstated. You will develop independence, resilience and self-knowledge, while learning about the world and developing cross-cultural skills with real-world career value. Many students discover life-long friends and build unexpected career skills while abroad, giving their personal and professional lives a boost they never would have gotten at home.

Any time you feel bogged down by a challenge during the planning process, remember to weigh your worries against the positive outcomes you’ll achieve by making your trip work.

This type of travel is more than just a vacation. Develop a clear mental picture of what going abroad means to you. This will help you as you encounter any moments of apprehension. Below, we’ll dive into some of the most common barriers to travel and pose counter-arguments to help you make the bold decision to go abroad no matter what.

**BONUS Quick Guide:**

*10 Reasons to Go Abroad During Your Studies*
Barrier #1: Cost

“It’s too expensive!”

The number one concern for most students is the cost associated with going abroad. It’s true that travel can have a hefty price tag and many students don’t have additional financial support from family or work. From visas to flights and accommodation to program costs, some students don’t even begin planning because the perceived cost is so high.

Solution:

The good news is that there are affordable programs and alternative solutions for almost every budget. Rest assured that no matter your financial status, it’s possible to gain international experience during school. If finances are tight, research, planning and dedication will be your three best friends. Your top tips for cutting costs are:

- **Find affordable programs**: Whether it means traveling to a developing nation, going abroad short-term or selecting a virtual program instead of an in-country one, there are affordable options!
- **Conduct cost comparisons** and talk to your study abroad office to find out more.
- **Apply for funding**: Scholarships, grants and financial aid are often available for international programs, but it can take some detective work to find opportunities. Research and reach out.
- **Study abroad offices** often have funds, grants and/or useful ideas at the ready. Make contact to get advice!
- **Get creative**: Take a part-time job to save for your program. Set up a crowdfunding page with a video telling friends and family why going abroad would mean the world to you. Start an online business. Plan to take on part-time work while you’re abroad. In short: get entrepreneurial!
- **Budget**: Start cutting down on unnecessary expenses (eat vegan, avoid bars and restaurants, stop buying new clothes) and write a detailed travel budget in advance.

Where there’s a will, there’s a way! Often, the imagined cost is much higher than the actual cost. There are many ways to budget and make it work.

BONUS Quick Guide:

**Funding Hacks: Going Abroad No Matter Your Budget**
Barrier #2: Academic concerns

“My studies will suffer.”

At most institutions, study abroad isn’t a built-in part of degree programs, and students might worry that time abroad could detract from academic outcomes. It might seem like an unnecessary extra or a distraction without real-world career value. Some students worry about losing credit, burning time or missing out on a specific part of their course load.

Solution:

Remember the huge value of international experience. Sometimes study abroad is considered a “nice-to-have” instead of a “must-have”, but in a globalized world, this is an outdated perspective. Over the past decade, international experience and cross-cultural skills have become sought-after by employers across all industries. Even if you do have to extend your studies or re-arrange your course load, trust us when we tell you it’s worth the effort!

• Planning: The number one way to combat academic concerns is planning. Firstly, connect with study abroad advisors to discuss time management and scheduling of your international experience (ask how other students have done it in the past). Together you may determine that a summer program might be your best option, or you could find a for-credit study abroad option that fits perfectly into your degree timeline. Once you have options, speak to academic advisors and professors. Tell them that going abroad is a key objective for you.

• Open-mindedness: In our experience, even when students have to add a gap year or semester, they never regret the decision to go abroad.

Barrier #3: FOMO

“I’ll miss home!”

You’ve got friends, family and activities at home. It’s hard to say goodbye to the people you see every day. Worrying about what you’ll miss, or about being forgotten, can be a strong emotional cocktail deterring you from going abroad.

Solution:

When it comes to FOMO, use it to propel you forward. Instead of thinking what you’ll miss at home, consider what you’ll miss by not going abroad. Think of the friends you won’t meet and the opportunities you won’t explore by staying at home. Your local friends will be there when you return, but going abroad is your opportunity to try new foods, new music, a new routine and a new culture. Don’t miss out!

BONUS Quick Guide: Personal Relationships While Abroad
Barrier #4:  
Non-international career goals

“It’s not relevant to my career goals.”

You have the belief that going abroad is for people who want to pursue an international career in the future. You’ve heard that there’s no reason why someone interested in a domestic job should actively pursue cross-cultural experiences. If you want to succeed in your home career, going abroad would just be a distraction.

Solution:

This is nothing more than an issue of awareness and perspective.

- **Snap out of it!** We live in a global world! Cross-cultural work skills are important, no matter what career you plan to pursue. Not only are most North American workplaces more diverse than ever, but more industries are making international connections too. From business to the arts, from government to scientific research, whether you’re an employee, a freelancer or an entrepreneur, there are countless ways that domestic organizations, companies and individuals are making new international connections.

- **Recognize the value of cross-cultural skills in domestic environments:** Even in the unlikely situation that you only ever work with North Americans, cross-cultural work skills still make you a better domestic worker, more able to effectively manage communication and challenges.

- **Understand the power of going global!** The world needs globally-minded young people! In the world today, we can clearly see the negative impact of closed-minded thinking. By informing yourself and expanding your horizons, you become a globally-minded voice in your community. And this has huge value. (By the way, going abroad might also change your career direction!)

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**BONUS Quick Guide:**

*Why You Need International Skills*
Barrier #5: Fear of the unknown

“I’m worried about safety.”

The media is full of scary stories about the world we live in. The stories they forget to tell are those about the billions of warm-hearted, welcoming people in cultures around the world who are eager to connect with new people. Many students worry about their personal safety abroad and have concerns about being in a new place alone.

Solution:

Don’t catastrophize! But do consider the reality of health and safety in your destination.

- **Street smarts** are always necessary, no matter where you travel. Petty crime like pickpocketing, for example, is easy to combat simply by staying aware of your surroundings, avoiding tourist hot spots and keeping valuables hidden from view. There are street-smart solutions to most minor travel concerns.

- **Research**: Ease your mind by reading travel blogs or watching vlogs from travelers who have been to your destination country. Use this info alongside official government guidelines and there’s almost no country you’ll need to avoid. (But don’t skip this step, especially if you are female or LGBT+).

- **Speak to students or professors who have been abroad**: Most will tell you they had no issues. Young people especially are naturally resilient and adaptable, able to overcome small challenges and be agile while abroad.

More often than not, travel is safer than we assume and even when we’re culturally different from locals abroad, we’re able to find connections and build bridges in unexpected places. In fact, this is one of the most rewarding parts of immersive travel!

BONUS Quick Guide:

*Health & Safety Abroad* (COMING SOON)
Barrier #6: A defeatist attitude

“I just think it’s impossible for me.”

This is a big one! Even for those who want to go abroad, a negative attitude can be a powerful barrier to international experience. When you think about going abroad, do you feel like it’s impossible, too much effort or that transitioning between cultures will be too uncomfortable? Does the idea of studying abroad make you feel fearful, worried or avoidant? You might be suffering from a bad attitude!

Solution:

There’s a famous saying, “Whether you think you can, or think you can’t, you’re right!” When it comes to going abroad, having a positive attitude is 80% of the battle.

• Take a step back: Recognize that negative thought patterns are rarely based in reality. They’re built in your mind, and are often the result of misplaced fear. If you find that you’re fostering a defeatist attitude, consciously re-focus on the positive outcomes of international experience.

• Try journaling: Consider journaling about your worries to get them out of your head and down on paper. Establish concrete issues that you feel will be challenging and focus on tackling them one by one instead of sitting under a cloud of worry. You’ll be amazed how far a positive attitude can take you!

• Avoid limiting beliefs: Sometimes we hold limiting beliefs about ourselves that aren’t actually true. We’ve heard of students who believed they were too introverted, awkward or eccentric to make it abroad. The common thread amongst them? They were all wrong! Any personality type can thrive abroad. Be prepared to surprise yourself.

Going abroad is not only possible, it’s actually relatively easy to do with a little support and preparation.

BONUS Quick Guide: Common Challenges for North Americans Abroad
Barrier #7: Nay-sayers

“My family doesn’t want me to go!”

Some parents are less supportive of international experiences than others. Most often they have your very best interests at heart, but they may be overly cautious about sending you to explore the world, especially if you’re interested in going to a developing nation. Sometimes even faculty could stand in the way, a result of a lack of awareness or recognition of the positive impact that study abroad can have on your career.

Solution:

You may have to be resilient in the face of nay-sayers, but this is also an important skill-building experience!

- **Make your case:** If you are one of the students whose family is fearful about sending them abroad, you may have to argue your point or even take action independently to make your adventure happen. Begin by arguing the benefits and putting them in contact with students and staff who’ve succeeded abroad.

- **Surround yourself with supporters:** Find professors, friends, family members and others who believe in the value of going abroad. Create a team of cheerleaders to help you along the way.

Although your decision is personal, and each family is unique, we can tell you that the majority of family fears about travel are unfounded, and that students who go abroad despite family resistance rarely regret it. It might be hard to branch out, but it’s worth it.

BONUS
Quick Guide:

8 People Who Can Help You Go Abroad
### Quick Chart: Overcoming Barriers to Going Abroad

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<th>BARRIER</th>
<th>SOLUTIONS</th>
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| **Cost**                     | • Find the most affordable programs  
                              • Apply for funding and grants  
                              • Create a detailed budget  
                              • Get entrepreneurial  |
| **Academic concerns**        | • Remember that study abroad is a “must-have”  
                              • Think ahead, prioritize planning  
                              • Speak to advisors to find workable options  |
| **You’re not pursuing an international career** | • Recognize that every career has international components  
                              • Recognize that cross-cultural skills have value at home  
                              • Understand that by going global, you’re part of a movement towards inclusion, understanding and positive change  |
| **Fear of the unknown**      | • Ease your mind with research  
                              • Don’t catastrophize  
                              • Build your street smarts  
                              • Speak to others who have been abroad  |
| **FOMO**                     | • Think of what you’ll miss if you don’t go abroad  
                              • Shift your focus to the opportunities that await overseas  |
| **A defeatist attitude**     | • Build a positive outlook  
                              • Step back and look objectively at your goals and resources  
                              • Try journaling to clarify your worries  
                              • Avoid limiting beliefs  |
| **Nay-sayers**               | • Inform yourself about your program of choice  
                              • Make your case in detail  
                              • Take action independently  
                              • Find people who support your goals  |

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