

*It's time to put on your research cap and start getting practical!*

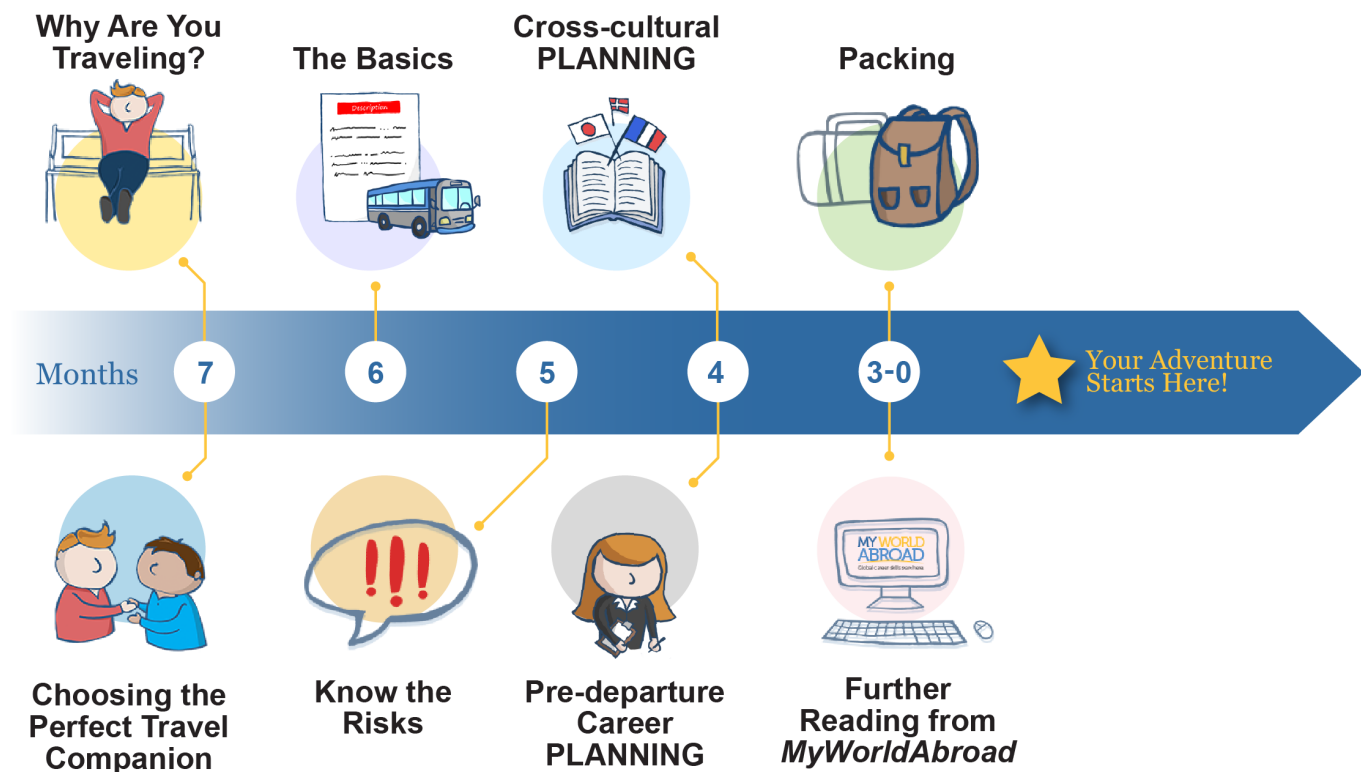
## Contemplate, Essential Research, Budget, Plan, and Pack

Once you've made the decision to go abroad, you will no doubt be anxious to get on that plane and start experiencing other cultures and building your International IQ. But wait! One of the most important elements of a successful voyage abroad is preparation.

Being well-prepared for your travels doesn't mean denying your natural spirit of adventure — In fact, being knowledgeable about your destination actually allows for far more spontaneity. Once you've figured out where you're headed, it's time to put on your research cap and start getting practical! From climate to transport and currency to security, there's so much to consider before you leave.



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## Why Are You Traveling?

There are countless reasons for going abroad, and it's important that you assess what yours are before leaving your home country.



Are you going abroad to develop a professional skill set? Learn a language? Engage with a foreign culture? – Knowing what you want to achieve will help you stay focused while abroad. Knowing why you are traveling can also act as a guiding light, should you be faced with any unexpected challenges while overseas.

It's also important to note that personal troubles or a need to escape are generally not good reasons for heading abroad, as the stresses of culture shock and cross-cultural isolation can sometimes exacerbate these issues rather than resolve them.

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## Choosing the Perfect Travel Companion

Traveling with someone you think you know very well is almost always a surprise. The way most people act under pressure is often very different from the way they act in social situations in their home country.

If you plan to go abroad with another person, you need to consider more than whether you are both interested in your destination. A travel partnership based simply on interest in the host country will get you through the airport, and not much beyond it!

You must choose someone with a similar approach to travel, a similar concept of spending and budgeting, a similar tolerance for risk, a similar daily schedule, and so many other similarities.

As in any relationship, no companion is as perfect as they first appear to be. This doesn't mean you won't be well-suited; it just means you must be prepared for rough waters and assess whether you will be able to navigate them with relative ease.

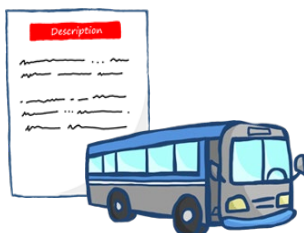
Consider taking a short trip with your intended travel companion before setting out on a long journey. It will give you valuable insight into how they deal with the unfamiliar. Read Rob Sangster's full article [Choosing the Perfect Travel Companion](#) to gain comprehensive insight into the positives and negatives of traveling with a companion.



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## The Basics

Passport, visas, travel insurance, transportation & accommodation.



**First, make sure you have the basics in order:** your passport, visas and travel insurance should be arranged up to six months in advance of your departure. It's simple to get the ball rolling with travel documents, and being without them can put an end to your travels before they've even begun.

**Next, consider transportation and accommodation.** Most students will be focused on keeping their costs down while covering maximum ground. Researching your options in advance is the best approach to budget travel, and deal-hunting can be easy if you know where to look.

**Stay in touch with your school.** Your school or agency is likely helping you with the practical side of things, such as plane tickets, passports, baggage allowances, visas, etc.

## Know the Risks

There is no need to find yourself in a high-risk area unexpectedly. Investigating the health and security risks of your destination before departure is absolutely crucial.

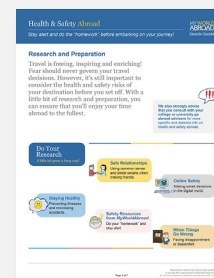
It can be easy to ignore them, but as Westerners we sometimes feel overconfident in foreign countries because of the freedoms we have at home. We can occasionally be guilty of assuming our safety in locations where, in reality, it is not guaranteed.

Keep up to date on travel advisories and health precautions in your destination country and know the location and contact information of your embassy in each of your destinations.

If you are headed to a mid- or high-risk area, contact a local travel health clinic well in advance of your departure and be sure you have all the necessary vaccines. The tools to make your trip safe, affordable and spectacular are at your fingertips. Put effort into researching before you leave so that, once your plane takes off, you can focus fully on having the most enriching cross-cultural experiences possible!



### Related Article



We recommend reading [Health & Safety Abroad](#) to help you with your safety preparations.

## Cross-cultural PLANNING

This checklist is designed to mentally prime for life abroad and to consider making cross-cultural learning a primary goal for your extraordinary journey ahead.

Allocate time before your go to research, reflect and record your thoughts about the intercultural adventure that awaits. Approach this with honesty and deep reflection.

Please utilize this as a checklist of ideas along with your school's pre-departure suggestions.



Define your cross-cultural goals

How do you plan to interact with locals abroad? (RELATED Quick Guide: [How to Be an Ethical International Volunteer](#) for more ideas about how to connect with locals.)

Talk to at least one student who has returned from abroad.

Ask them about their experiences, what they learned and what they found challenging.

Talk to someone from your destination country.

Devise a strategy to find an individual from your destination country within your school, local community, or partner-organization abroad. Formulate questions to inquire about their culture and homeland.

What challenges do you expect to face?

List things that you expect to find challenging as you arrive and adjust abroad.

Commit to conducting cultural research

Read books and articles about your destination country until you feel you have a basic understanding of the culture. (RELATED Quick Guide and links within, especially pg. 6: [How to Research a Culture.](#))

Commit to making language learning a daily activity.

In the months before your departure, try to boost your vocabulary by a few words each week. Focus on a few greetings to say hello, goodbye, thank you, delicious, enjoyable. (RELATED article: [How to Learn a Language.](#))

## Pre-departure Career PLANNING

This checklist is designed to prompt you to consider committing to career goals before leaving for your journey ahead.

By thoroughly engaging with these ideas, questions and tasks, you're not just preparing — you're setting yourself up to excel during and after your adventure.



Define you're your career goals for your time abroad

Write a list of ways in which you plan to add career value to your trip abroad. (RELATED ARTICLES: [100+ Career-boosting Strategies While Abroad.](#))

Research companies and individuals working in your field in your destination city or region.

Think about the value of meeting a professional abroad who is doing work in your industry. This could be a local expert or an expat based abroad. Note their contact details and industry notes.

Try making a few professional contacts abroad before you even leave home.

Contact one or more people who work in your industry in your destination city and see if you would be open to meeting with you for coffee when you arrive. Consider organizing this meeting for yourself as well as for a few of your travel companions or other students related to your program abroad. (RELATED RESOURCE LIST: See [Expatriate Networking Sites.](#))

Commit to writing your international resume

Prepare to arrive in your host country with a complete and updated resume for networking or possible future job opportunities.

What skills do you think you will have developed when you return home?

Make a list of ten skills that you expect to improve. (RELATED Quick Guides: See links on page 5: [Why You Need International Skills.](#))

# Packing

Packing is one of the most important parts of your pre-departure preparation. Don't leave it until the last minute! You'll want to pack as light as possible, while still taking everything you need for the duration of your travels.



Find out what toiletries you'll have access to in your destination. There's no use weighing yourself down with items you'll easily be able to buy once you arrive. And pack for functionality instead of fashion. You should always have a professional-looking outfit available in your luggage in case a job opportunity comes along, but avoid the temptation to pack all outfits for all seasons. You'll just end up weighing yourself down unnecessarily.

If you're backpacking, you'll have to be particularly rigorous about what you take.

The weight of your backpack can make the difference between a comfortable journey and an uncomfortable one. You'd be surprised at how many "crucial" comforts of home you can actually live without!

Finally, pay attention while you pack. Make a mental note of where in your luggage you are placing particular items. There's nothing more frustrating than arriving on the ground, needing a particular item, and having to unpack your entire suitcase to find it.

## Packing Checklist



The contents of your luggage will be different depending on where and why you are going abroad, but the checklist below will give you a strong start.

### Tickets

Make sure you have printed all airplane, train and bus tickets you'll need to get to your destination. Many people now also use electronic tablets and smart phones to check in or confirm transportation reservations with QR codes or online reservation codes. Whatever your booking confirmation, double check that you have the information you need for every step of your journey. Also, make sure you have terminal numbers/letters and directions between stations.

### Passport

You will need to keep your passport with you for international travel. Be aware that in many countries, you'll also need your passport to do basic things like checking into a hotel. Make sure you keep it in a safe place where you can always access it. If your passport is going to expire at any point in the near future, check with your home country authorities (US/Canadian embassy or consulate) about the rules and regulations regarding renewing it while abroad. NOTE: Some countries will not let you travel on a passport that is due to expire within six months.

### Documentation

As a rule of thumb it's always good to have printed proof of where you are going and why. Do you have a letter of acceptance for a job or internship? Do you have a program acceptance letter from a foreign post-secondary institution? Are you traveling on a work visa? Do you have reservation receipts from the hostels you're staying at? – You will likely need to present physical proof of where you are headed, why and for how long.

### Emergency numbers

Keep one printed list, and one electronic list of important phone numbers. You should always have access to the number of your home country's embassy, your insurance company, your in-country contacts (school program, internship coordinator, volunteer program administrator, etc.), your bank, your hotels, your host family and any additional contacts you can reach out to in case of emergency.



## Medicine and first aid

If you have any prescriptions, be sure to bring enough to last you the duration of your travels. The same goes for contact lenses. Contact lens wearers should also be sure to have enough lens solution, a pair of prescription glasses and a printout of your eye prescription in case you need to get an emergency pair of glasses while abroad. A small first aid kit is always a good idea, especially if you are backpacking, hiking, or working in an outdoor or labor-intensive environment.

## Clothes

As mentioned above, we often don't need as many clothes as we think we do. Think about seasons, altitudes and practicality rather than fashion. What are you planning on doing while abroad? Will you be hiking? Playing sports? Working outdoors? Working in an urban office environment? – Pack carefully according to what your plans are. We recommend that no matter where you're headed, you have at least one professional-looking outfit with you in case an unexpected career opportunity presents itself.

## Currency

Have a small amount of cash in the currency of your destination country, as well as your home country currency.

## Gifts

If you're staying with a host family or visiting a needy organization, you might consider taking a small gift to show your appreciation and present it upon your arrival.

## Adapters

Remember that plugs and voltage numbers are different almost all over the world – if you are taking a computer, hairdryer or any other device requiring electricity, make sure you've purchased the correct adapter cables for your destination country.

## The professional edge

We've already suggested taking a professional outfit in your suitcase. If you can keep them pristine, why not also take a resume or a few basic business cards with your email address on them? – You will of course want to have access to the original files via email or cloud share technology, but you never know who you might find yourself next to on the airplane, and you'd certainly make an impression on a potential employer by having your documents accessible in your carry-on luggage.

## Special circumstances

If you're heading to a developing nation, you may have to bring a few extra items, such as water purification tablets, a mosquito net and records of any vaccinations you had to get for your trip.

## What to leave at home

No matter where you're traveling to, it's probably a good idea to leave expensive or sentimental items at home. Anything that could draw attention to you or that you would be devastated to lose is probably best left at home.

# Further Reading from MyWorldAbroad

The process of going abroad starts long before you step on the plane. Budget time to plan, pack, research and contemplate before heading abroad, whether you're studying, working, volunteering, interning or traveling. Check out these suggestions for further reading



## Everyday Skills for Succeeding Abroad



Can you articulate what made you successful abroad? This article offers a basic outline of skills that international people possess.

[View Quick Guide](#)

## Culture Shock



Culture shock is an inevitable part of the transition abroad, but understanding its effects and "cures" can help.

[View Quick Guide](#)

## How to Be an Ethical Traveler



Despite the volunteer-focused title, this article offers fantastic advice about how to approach any host country population, with an open mind and a respectful demeanor.

[View Quick Guide](#)



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