

2 Preparing for Departure

[Pre-departure Checklist Booklet](#)

Great to keep you on track as you get ready to go! Print it out and use it. We also have Pre-Departure meetings at the end of the semester where you can ask questions and get advice – watch our website for dates.

Required Travel Documents

You will need a passport and sometimes a student visa. If a visa is required, OIE/Auburn Abroad will help you complete the application.

Passport

[Apply for a passport](#) at the Lee County Justice Center, 2311 Gateway Drive, Opelika (Phone: 334-749-7141) You will need to apply for a new passport if you have never had one before, if your passport was issued before your 16th birthday, or if your passport has expired. In general, you'll need the following to apply:

- Application form
- Proof of your citizenship (an original birth certificate or a previous passport)
- Proof of identity (driver's license or a previous passport)
- Two identical 2" x 2" passport photos taken within six months
- Fees (\$97 for a new passport or \$60 to renew)

Allow 12 weeks for processing (check with OIE for updates). If your passport's expiration date is any earlier than 6 months after your planned return date, you will need to renew your passport before departure. This can be done by mail - see the State Dept. Passport Web Site for a downloadable form. This site also contains information about how you can also have your passport expedited if you are running out of time before your departure.

http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html



Family on Horseback by Leslie Justice – spring 2004 in Spain at the Festival de Feria.

Visa

Nope, this isn't your credit card! A visa is a sticker, stamp, or paper attached to your passport by an embassy or consulate that allows you to enter or travel to a country for a certain period of time for specific purposes (e.g., tourism, business, or studies). Check with your program and with OIE Study Abroad advisors to see if one is required for your program, and if so, where and how to apply. Check our website for information on some of our most popular destinations.

[Visa requirements vary from country to country and change often!](#)

The type of visa and the documents required to obtain one will vary depending on the country in which you will study, the duration of stay, etc. The visa process is often involved and somewhat confusing, so students should not procrastinate! OIE will support students as much as possible, so as soon as students have been accepted to their program they should begin the visa process immediately (most consulates allow you to send an application up to 90 days before you depart)! Do not attempt to enter a foreign country without the correct immigration documents for your planned activities. You could be turned away, fined, or delayed significantly.

Emergency Medical Assistance Plan for Auburn Abroad Students while Abroad on their Programs

The AU Emergency Medical Assistance Plan for Auburn Abroad students, faculty and staff includes 24/7 emergency assistance call center, emergency medical evacuation, and repatriation. OIE enrolls you using the dates of your departure and return. Students often travel before and after their programs and should be independently insured during this time as well. Detailed information regarding the specific nature of this plan is available on our website and from study abroad advisors. Auburn Abroad students receive a card for this plan via email.

Major Medical Insurance

Check to make sure that your personal or family's insurance covers you while abroad. Call them before you leave and verify their emergency and claims procedures.

MEDEX Assist

Our current plan is with MEDEX and serves the needs of Auburn Abroad students, AU faculty and staff while abroad. MEDEX provides worldwide 24/7 call center assistance utilizing multilingual coordinators – to provide medical, travel, security, and other related assistance services. MEDEX will assist with any type of problem, regardless of the severity. Don't feel embarrassed to call them if you have a problem. For more information go to: www.medexassist.com

Travel Clinic, why go to one before you leave?

Three to six months before you go abroad, it is wise to have a regular medical check-up to make sure everything is in order, and to ask your doctor what travel immunizations you may need.

Visit the web pages of the [Centers of Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov) and [Travel Health Online](http://www.travelhealthonline.com) (Login required) to see the general health precautions and vaccinations they recommend for the countries you will be visiting. If you are diabetic, you may need to take a supply of disposable syringes (with a note from your doctor). For certain conditions (diabetes, asthma, mild epilepsy, or an allergy to penicillin, you may want to wear a bracelet, ID tag, or carry a card identifying your condition for safety.

Civil and Legal Matters

Civil and legal matters to consider when abroad include: host country legal systems, absentee voting, income tax, power of attorney, U.S. customs and duties.

1. **Host Country Legal Systems**

Be aware of your host country's laws, since they may differ significantly from U.S. laws. You could be presumed guilty until proven otherwise. The U.S. Embassy may not be able to help you – movies often don't portray the real world.

2. **Absentee Voting - U.S.**

If students are not in the U.S. at election time, they still can cast a ballot if they have already registered to vote at home. Information about completing and mailing absentee ballots has to be obtained prior to departure (if sent by surface mail, they may arrive too late to be used). Remember to make note of party, ward, district, and voter registration number. If you are not a U.S. citizen, check with your embassy about your voting laws.

3. **Income Taxes**

IRS regulations allow individuals who are temporarily living abroad to request an extension of the deadline for filing federal income tax forms. Students who are already overseas may contact the American consulate or embassy. A **Form 1040** and other forms may be available from the consulate and a consular officer may be able to assist with questions. Students can file abroad if the necessary arrangements are made. Remember ultimately you must file your U.S. and state income tax forms, and failure to do so can result in penalties that may include higher payments.

4. **Power of Attorney**

If a student's signature will be needed for an official or legal document during his/her absence, he/she may give someone "power of attorney," which is the power to act on his/her behalf. This may be useful for endorsement of a check for financial aid. To perform a power of attorney, write out in detail the specific duties that the person chosen will be allowed to do and have the document notarized.

5. U.S. Customs and Duties

You can register expensive items you are taking abroad (cameras, laptops, etc.) with U.S. Customs before you leave, so that they won't be subject to duty upon your return. Save receipts for purchases made overseas – you may be able to get reimbursed for taxes paid (VAT). Currently, you can bring \$800.00 in gifts or souvenirs back duty free (check before purchasing too much. Above that amount, you will pay approximately ten percent of the value of items as import duty.

<http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/>

6. Foreign Customs and Duties

Many countries have limitations on what you can take in and out. Restrictions on food items, drugs, etc., can cause you delays and fees. These restrictions apply to the mail as well as during travel (U.S. and foreign).



Plaza Mayor in Salamanca, Spain

Making Travel Arrangements

Airfare

Some travel companies offer discounted tickets to students. Keep in mind that these “cheap” tickets may be nonrefundable, non-changeable, subject to delays (you have priorities, too), and may charge high fees for excess luggage weight. **Check with your favorite carrier, too – sky miles are great to have, and their prices may be very competitive.** Please refer to the following links when searching for affordable tickets:

- [STA Travel](#) - The world's largest student travel agency
- [Student Flights, Inc.](#) – You can tailor-make your flight schedule to match your travel plans: fly one way or stay abroad as long as a year; you can even fly to one city and return from another. You can also have an open return date, but be careful to book your return flight well in advance because the tickets are restricted and depend on availability. These special rates require the purchase of an [ISE card](#), but can be well worth it.

There are airlines based out of various European cities that have some incredibly good deals on flights all around Europe. They price according to supply and demand so the earlier you book the less expensive your flight will be. Make sure you check on baggage requirements before you pack for an excursion – overages can be very expensive. Many airlines now charge by the bag and severely restrict carry-on baggage. Although we can't specifically recommend companies, the following airlines have been especially popular with Auburn students:

- [Ryan Air](#) - based out of Dublin
- [EasyJet](#) - based out of London

Rail and Bus Passes

If you are planning on traveling in Europe, buying some kind of rail pass may be a good idea. There are many different kinds of passes to choose from, including single and multi-country passes. Many people are already familiar with the Eurailpass that can be purchased on-line through: Another excellent and much cheaper rail pass is the [InterRail](#), which is valid in most European countries.

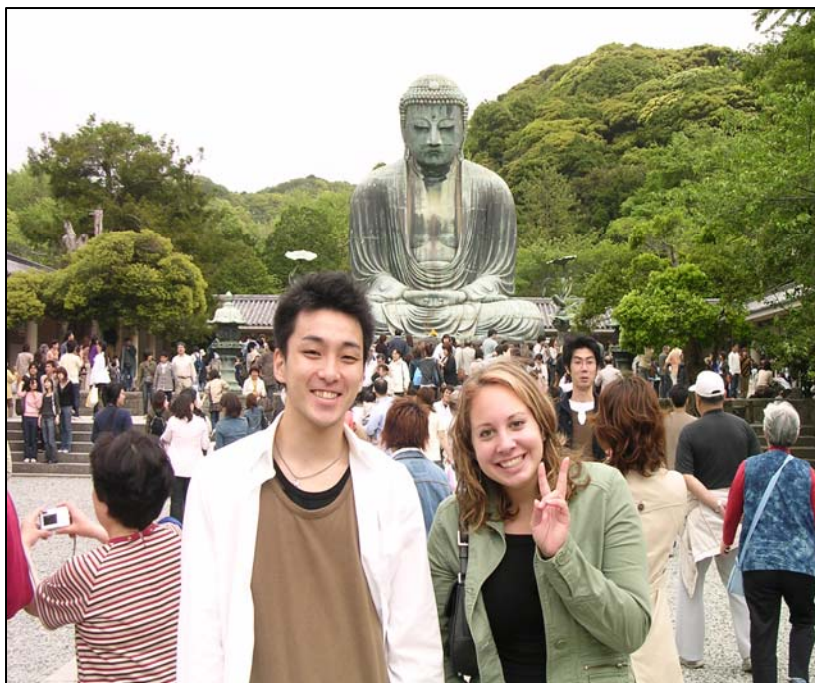
Most travel agencies and especially the local study abroad program offices will be able to refer you to the local options.

Visit [Busabout](#) to find out about bus hopping in Europe.

Student Discount Travel Cards

Students may wish to consider the purchase of a student discount card, such as the ISIC, which is widely used in mainland Europe. The ISIC card entitles students who are traveling abroad to discounts on airfare, travel, currency exchange, museums, and other activities. If purchased in the U.S., it also provides students with *limited* health and accident insurance as well as evacuation and repatriation benefits. The ISIC costs \$22, and can be purchased on-line through [STA Travel](#). Another option is the ISE card, which offers similar discounts www.isecard.com and costs \$25. The “value” offered by these cards is completely dependent on your travel plans, destination, and how you interact with the local culture (museums, concerts, shows, etc.). These cards may not be useful in all countries. Check out your host program and country or the card resource sites.

Nihon University in Tokyo, Japan, has an exchange program with Auburn's College of Business and Jessica Dean studied there in the spring of 2004.



[Global Tiger Tale](#)

Get a Good Guidebook

Bookstores have a wide variety of city and country travel guides (you can also check them out from the library). By reading more than one, you can get a feel for your chosen host culture. *Let's Go* and *The Lonely Planet* series offer lots of useful background and cultural information on countries (also *Fodor's* and *Eyewitness*). They include maps, and currency exchange tips to help get you off to a running start.

How Will I Communicate?

E-mail is the least expensive and perhaps best way to stay in touch with friends, family, and OIE Study Abroad while you are away. Ground mail can be very slow. SKYPE and other computer based programs are worth exploring and you can check with your telephone company to determine the best way to use cell phones. Some programs include a cell phone and others offer the opportunity to rent one during your program abroad. Phone cards work well (check www.goabroad.com), and your family and friends can add an international plan to their phone service before you go that would allow them to call you at very reasonable rates. Regular and cell phone calls internationally can cost upward of \$2-\$3-\$5 per minute unless you plan early.



Shadows over King's Canyon taken by Amanda Matson in the Outback region of Australia 2004

Budgets, Money Transfer and Banking

The major costs of a study abroad program are typically billed and paid prior to departure or through an extended payment plan. Find out before departure exactly what will and will not be covered in the program fee. This information will assist in determining out of pocket expenses. Some financial strategies to follow are:

Budgeting

Once expenses are identified, setting up a proposed weekly budget will help you to live within pre-established limits. If you run out of money overseas, it is difficult to find a means of replenishment. Suggestions to help stay within budget:

- Make weekly and daily budgets and stick to them
- When traveling, options include hostels or modest bed-and-breakfast accommodations instead of more expensive hotels.
- Plan entertainment and recreation around the availability of free, inexpensive, and discounted events
- Shop in street markets or at major chain markets
- Enjoy eating local foods and using local brands of toiletries
- Look for student rates and discounts and know what is available with ISIC, ISE, or other student cards

Money Transfer

Traveler's checks, credit cards, ATM cards, and cash all have advantages and disadvantages. Much depends on your location. It is best to have several forms of payment available, since some will be more practical in one country than in another. **Never carry large amounts of cash.** Traveler's checks and ATM cards are safe and convenient means of obtaining local currency as needed, but may be hard to use in more remote areas.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are easy to use and are generally widely accepted worldwide. They are also replaceable if lost or stolen. Call your credit card companies before you leave to check on any PIN numbers needed, fees or restrictions. **Let them know when you will be out of the country, so that they won't stop payment thinking your card has been stolen when they suddenly get charges from abroad.** Make a photocopy of credit cards/ATM cards and take one with you and leave one with family in case you need to cancel them quickly. Also, make sure you ask if your credit cards have a daily limit of what you can withdraw.

ATM Cards

One of the best ways of obtaining cash in the foreign currency at good exchange rates is by using your ATM card abroad. There are ATM machines in most major cities (exceptions being in less traveled or more remote areas away from city centers), and you can use your normal account and pin to withdraw money in the foreign currency. Check with your bank – some will waive ATM fees abroad if asked. If you overdraw your account, you may pay major fees and penalties – check with your bank on their policies.

Traveler's Checks/Prepaid T.C. Cards

The great advantage of traveler's checks is that if lost or stolen, the issuer guarantees a refund as long as you report the loss promptly. The disadvantage is that they are used far less commonly these days and for that reason it is more difficult to cash them! Issuers include: American Express, Thomas Cook, Citicorp, and VISA. Always record check numbers and keep them separate from the checks. Leave a copy in the U.S. for backup. Without a receipt and the check numbers you won't be able to get a refund! If you use a pre-paid card, make sure you photocopy it along with your other cards.

Banking

It's difficult to establish a bank account abroad before you arrive in another country, but the on-site program orientation after you get settled should advise you if you choose to open an account abroad. Other ways to have money transferred from home include:

Wire transfers are often quick, but will be expensive and unreliable in some regions. Fees may apply on both ends of transactions.

Cashier's Checks can be drawn against a major American bank, but the process will be slow and local currency exchange rates will apply.

American Express Money Orders are rather quick. This transaction can be initiated at an American Express office in the U.S. and completed at a branch office abroad.

Traveling Safely

When traveling, you may be so enchanted by what you see that you let your guard down. **Be vigilant and exercise good judgment anytime you are in unfamiliar surroundings.** Doing so will help you avoid any potentially dangerous situations. Avoid dressing like a tourist to deter pick pockets. Caps or shirts with an American flag on them are best left at home, although you can take shirts or caps with an Auburn logo. Watch how the locals are dressing and follow suit. Never carry large sums of money with you, and keep your credit/debit cards, cash, and passport in a money belt or neck pouch under your shirt when traveling. Don't put all your money or credit/ATM cards in one place and leave your passport, extra cash, and expensive jewelry in a safe, if possible, in your dorm or hotel. Hostels and other inexpensive options may have inherent risks for safeguarding your valuables – leave some at "home" while on excursions if possible. If you are a victim of crime, file a police report even if you are not hurt – you may need it for insurance purposes.

"You're not in Kansas anymore!"

When abroad, you must abide by the rules of the country in which you are living or traveling; **penalties can be harsh for abusing drugs or alcohol.** Also, learning to appreciate the differences in cultures can make your time abroad much more enjoyable. Your Program Director should provide you with adequate and informative pre-departure orientation materials. Do plenty of research on the region you will be visiting. For more information on safety abroad and general travel advice see the links on our website.

Both the [U.S. State Department](#) and the [Overseas Security Advisory Council](#) issue daily on-line travel warnings and announcements. As an American, it is wise to stay abreast of current world events while abroad. You may find that many people want to discuss their political opinions with you. Depending on your comfort level, it may be a good idea to devise a way to diplomatically handle politically aggressive individuals or to avoid such potentially volatile conversations completely. Walking away is always an acceptable option. Think before you act and stay safe.