

PRE DEPARTURE

Helpful Checklists, Cultural Information, and Tips for Immersion Preparation



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Print this page out and use it as a handy checklist for pre-departure.

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PRE DEPARTURE ONE

Use our Checklist to Help Prepare For Your Study Abroad Trip

In this section, we have prepared the nine steps to success for preparing for your study abroad trip. We cover reviewing your confirmation statement, which documents you need and how to acquire them, where to research flights and what to do once you book your flight, issues revolving around traveling with money, how to stay connected to your family and friends while abroad, the best language preparation methods, helpful packing tips and resources, books, maps, and accessories, and finally, ways to stay healthy abroad.



Step 1: Reviewing Your Confirmation Statement

After you apply for your AmeriSpan program, you will receive a confirmation statement. **REVIEW THIS STATEMENT** carefully to avoid problems often encountered by study abroad participants. Taking 10 -15 minutes now can avoid time-consuming headaches and will help you make a smooth transition to your host country.

- ☐ **Name, email, emergency contact, passport number:** Be sure that all the information is complete and correct.
- ☐ **Location and school:** Simple, but it does occasionally happen! Be sure to confirm that you are enrolled in the right program at the right location.
- ☐ **Check your lodging type, start date, and end date.** Make sure your arrival and departure coordinate with your flights.
- ☐ **Make sure your arrival information is correct.** Make sure the dates and times are correct. Sometimes, when flying internationally, you may not land on the same day as you left home on. Also, it is best to give your arrival time in 24-hour format to ensure that there are no mix-ups between morning and night. Many other countries use the 24-hour clock, so it might be beneficial to figure it out before you go.
- ☐ **If you are not getting airport pickup,** you must give a time frame for your arrival to your host family. Usually, you should plan on 2-3 hours from the time that your flight is due to arrive. This gives time for flight delays, customs, baggage claim, and transport to your new home.
- ☐ **For both single- and multi-site programs,** bear in mind that full payment must be made prior to the beginning of your first program.

Now that you have reviewed your confirmation statement, you are ready to begin collecting all the necessary documents for your trip.

AmeriSpan's Golden Rules for Study Abroad

Golden Rule #1: Standards of living vary, especially in Latin America.

Most participants are coming from a country with a higher standard of living where modern day conveniences are taken for granted.

Golden Rule #2: Keep your expectations realistic.

The number one reason for unsatisfactory experiences is unrealistic expectations. If you are unsure of something or have a special request, check with us. We'll give you a straight yes or no answer.

Step 2: Documents

There are many documents that you will need to get in order prior to your trip.

- ☐ **Passport:** If you do not have one, make sure to apply for one at least 6-8 weeks prior to your departure in order to save money and headaches from expediting your passport. If you already have one, check the expiration date. For travel to many countries, it is required that your passport be valid for a minimum of 6 months after you are planning to return home. Also make sure there are enough blank pages left. A good website to order or renew your passport at is PassportVisasExpress.com. A helpful article: [Don't Forget Passports When Studying Abroad](#)
- ☐ **Visa:** While many countries do not require travel visas, there are some that do. Also, the length of your stay can be a factor as to if you will need a visa or not; some countries require a visa for a stay longer than 30 days. A good website to research and purchase visas is PassportVisasExpress. A helpful article: [Travel Visas For Study Abroad](#)
- ☐ **Birth certificate:** You will usually need an original birth certificate to apply for a passport and some visas. If you have lost your birth certificate, you can get an official replacement copy at RocketLawyer.com
- ☐ **International driving permit:** If you think you may be interested in driving while overseas, it can't hurt to get an International Driving Permit before you go. www.aaa.com
- ☐ **Student discount cards:** If you are a student, check out the International Student Identity Card ([ISIC](#)) and International Student Exchange Card ([ISEC](#)). These identity cards are good worldwide for discounts on travel, lodging, restaurants, attractions, and much more. A helpful article: [Student Discount Cards for Study Abroad](#)
- ☐ **Prescriptions:** In order to fly, you will need your prescriptions in clearly marked containers; it is best to keep them in their original containers. Be sure to refill any prescriptions that might run out while you are abroad. Also, it is an excellent idea to get a note from your doctor listing your prescriptions and why you need them.
- ☐ **Insurance:** It is possible to acquire short-term medical insurance for travel, flight, luggage, and trip cancellation. We like [Travel Guard Insurance](#) for great trip coverage.

Now you have your Documents, what's next?

Safeguarding measures in case your documents are lost or stolen:

- ☐ Make sure you leave a copy of your passport, travel documents, and AmeriSpan confirmation statement with family or friends prior to departure.
- ☐ Always have a copy of your travel confirmation statement in your carry on luggage of in-country/program emergency contact numbers, host family address, hotel info, etc.
- ☐ While abroad, keep your documents in a safe location, and just carry copies of necessary documents on your person. Sometimes, you will need the originals so keep the copies in a safe location
- ☐ Another trick is to scan and email yourself copies of all your documents. This way, if something is lost or stolen, you can access them if you have Internet access at your location.

Step 3: Airfare

There are so many airfare sites available, which are the best? Also, what to do once your flight is booked? First of all, AmeriSpan recommends that you wait until your program is confirmed prior to booking any non-refundable airfare. After confirmation, take the following steps.

Research Flights

- ☐ A great discount site is [CheapOAir](#), which also offers rental cars, hotels, and even flight insurance.
- ☐ [eXito Travel](#) is the best source for flights to anywhere in Latin America. They have special negotiated low fares to Mexico, Central and South America.
- ☐ It can't hurt to try out the big guys, like [Priceline](#) and [Travelocity](#).
- ☐ [STA Travel USA](#) is a good source for discounted student flights.
- ☐ [Trax](#) is an unbiased travel search engine.

After Flight Research & Program Confirmation

- ☐ Book & pay for flight
- ☐ Contact AmeriSpan with flight details www.amerispan.com/clientsupport
- ☐ Decide if you want airport pickup
- ☐ Check confirmation for contact name & number to call if flight is delayed

Study Abroad Tips: Flight Complications

Let's face it, sometimes flying can be a hassle - unexpected delays, security measures, cancellations, and more can arise when traveling, even if you've done all you can to be organized and arrive early. Take these steps to minimize problems:

- 1. Verify Flights with Airline:** Flight information can often be confirmed on airlines' websites, and some offer text or voicemail alerts.
- 2. Check Flying & Airport Conditions:** Take notice of negative weather or security conditions at your departing airport, any connecting airports and your destination.
 - US airport conditions can be found at: <http://www.fly.faa.gov/flyfaa/usmap.jsp>
 - International weather can be found at: <http://www.weather.com>
- 3. Keep AmeriSpan Posted:** If there are ANY changes to your flight in advance and you are expecting an airport pick-up, AmeriSpan needs to know. We can let the school know that there is a possibility you won't make it on time, and to keep their eyes on ETAs before dispatching pickups.
- 4. Last Minute Changes - Call Your Emergency Contact:** Our office isn't open after 7:00 pm on Fridays or on the weekends, when most of our students travel. If an AmeriSpan employee cannot be reached because it is the weekend or a national holiday, you must call the flight delay or emergency number on your program confirmation and let the school know when you will arrive. If you miss your pickup without notifying the appropriate on-site contact, you may have to make your own way to your lodging. Remember, the emergency contact information is listed on your AmeriSpan confirmation so keep a copy on your person when traveling.

Step 4: Money Matters

There are many things to consider when budgeting for study abroad. Make a list of everything you can think of that you will need to pay for on a daily basis. Don't forget to include lodging and meals that aren't included with your program; personal items, such as toiletries, clothing, nights out, and souvenirs; additional travel, excursions, and daily local transportation; and some extra money in case of emergency.

How much cash should you carry? If your teenager is going abroad, what is the best way to give them money? How and where do you exchange currency? Does your bank charge you extra fees for credit or debit card use overseas? How about traveler's checks? Also, will you be charged a departure tax when leaving the host country? Click on the links below for answers to all of these questions and more.

- ☐ [Study Abroad Money: How Much Cash to Carry](http://www.AmeriSpan.com/travel) (www.AmeriSpan.com/travel)
- ☐ [Money Matters for Teenager Study Abroad](http://www.AmeriSpan.com/travel) (www.AmeriSpan.com/travel)
- ☐ Online currency exchange: [Travelex](http://www.Travelex.com)
- ☐ [ATM/Debit Card Use](http://www.AmeriSpan.com/travel) (www.AmeriSpan.com/travel)
- ☐ [Credit Card Use Overseas](http://www.consumerist.com) (www.consumerist.com)
- ☐ Traveler's checks: [Travelex](http://www.Travelex.com)
- ☐ Departure Tax: [Don't Forget about Departure Tax when Studying Abroad](http://www.AmeriSpan.com/travel) (www.AmeriSpan.com/travel)

Things to Consider When Budgeting

_____ Airline extra baggage charges	_____ Souvenirs
_____ Airport arrival & departure taxes	_____ Going out (bars, dinners, etc...)
_____ Entry fees/tourist card cost	_____ Phone use/cellphone/calling card
_____ Visa extensions	_____ Internet fees at Internet cafes
_____ Out-of-pocket school activity fees	_____ Incidentals: film, batteries, laundry, toiletries, etc...
_____ Book fees/deposits	_____ Unexpected emergencies
_____ Lodging damage deposits	_____ Other: _____
_____ Transport to/from lodging & school	_____
_____ Weekend travel/excursions	_____
_____ Daily meals	_____ Total

Step 5: Staying in Touch & Communication

If your cell phone and cell phone carrier offer international service to your host country for reasonable rates, great! But if not, don't despair. There are options out there!

- ☐ **Cell phone:** A great option for worldwide use is the [Mobal GSM World Phone](#). Read about it here: [Keeping In Touch While Studying Abroad](#) (www.AmeriSpan.net). For trips to Europe, check out the [Eurobuzz Phone & SIM Cards](#).
- ☐ **Phone card:** AmeriSpan has an international phone card. Click if you are interested in purchasing an [AmeriSpan phone card](#). (www.AmeriSpan.ekit.com/ekit/home)
- ☐ **International country codes:** Participants & Their Families should know how to dial internationally. This website includes all country calling codes, and instructions: www.countrycallingcodes.com
- ☐ **ATT USA Direct:** A service where you dial a code in the foreign country and then dial the USA to save on the rates of calls. They even work with cell phones. The ATT allows you to use the calling card and credit cards. Country access numbers and other info at www.usa.att.com/traveler
- ☐ **Skype:** Skype is a free and/or cheap way to make phone calls, chat, text, and even video calls. Skype to Skype calls, etc. are free, and you can download it for free at www.skype.com. To make calls or texts to a non-skype cell phone or land line, you can either use a pay-as-you-go plan or a monthly plan. It's a great way to keep in touch while overseas, and all you need is an Internet connection and a headset. To make a call, you can enter a phone number, search for a business or person, or go to your contacts list. They even make importing contacts from your email easy! AmeriSpan has a system set up where we don't have to be logged into Skype for the calls to come through, they simply forward to our main phone line.
- ☐ **Internet:** Find out prior to your trip about Internet access. Is it available at the school? Most likely. Is it available at your homestay? Maybe not. A good source for Internet while abroad is in Internet cafes in town. A laptop will make this much more accessible. Interested in getting a laptop? [Mac](#) or [PC](#)? Need [laptop accessories](#), like batteries or AC adapters?

Contacting AmeriSpan:

- ☐ Email at info@amerispan.com
- ☐ Skype to 'amerispan' (note: if we are offline with skype the call automatically forwards to our main switchboard)
- ☐ Live chat service at www.amerispan.com
- ☐ We are in the office from 09:00 am to 19:00 pm Eastern Time from Mon-Fri
- ☐ You may also call us at +1-215-751-1100
- ☐ Emergency message service: During an emergency if your family can't contact you, they may call us 24 hours/day, dictate the message and we will relay the message to you. Conversely, if you cannot reach your family and it is an emergency, call us collect from anywhere and we will relay the message.

Step 6: Packing

Gulp. You're going to be overseas for HOW long? Uh oh, you'd better pack everything you own, right? No way! AmeriSpan has compiled some excellent tips on how to pack properly, even downright meagerly, and still have plenty of stuff to wear. And guess what? That place you're going to, that foreign land? They have stores there! Kidding aside, it is quite possible to pack everything you will need in one, carry-on bag. No joke. Of course, it is imperative to do some weather/climate research (www.Weather.com is a good place to start), and your duration will have some affect on the amount you need to pack. We recommend some excellent bags, the [Patagonia MLC](#) and, for those who love wheels, the [Patagonia MLC Wheelie](#). Also, it can be worth your while to check out some [noise canceling headphones](#) and a [money belt](#).

Want to know our secrets to packing? Download our free e-report, [AmeriSpan's Ultimate Guide to Packing](#). For more reading, check out [Fodor's How to Pack](#).

Step 7: Language Preparation

If you are a beginner at the language you will be studying abroad, or even if you are a bit rusty, it's not a bad idea to do a little language preparation prior to your trip. This can be a major factor in easing your culture shock, and make the beginning days and weeks of your study abroad trip much easier!

Good language software and resources to check out:

- ❑ **Think Language:** [Think Spanish](#) and [Think French](#) are at-home language immersion programs that are designed to increase language fluency while teaching about life and culture abroad. Both have online magazines and memberships that are for new and continuing students of Spanish and French that offer an engaging, non-intimidating approach to language learning.

Step 8: Books, Maps, and More!

We absolutely love the [Kindle](#)! It is transforming travel, among many other things. If you've ever lugged a bunch of books around, you know how heavy they are! The Kindle has revolutionized books and packing for travel. Read our article to learn more ways the Kindle is beneficial for travel. [Kindle 2 for Study Abroad](#) (www.AmeriSpan.net). Amazon also recently added a new version, the [Kindle DX](#), which has a larger screen and more memory. Also, [eBooks.com](#) is a great resource for thousands of downloadable eBooks.

Of course, if the Kindle is a little rich for your blood, old-fashioned print books are the way to go. Some of the best guidebooks are from [Lonely Planet](#). Read an article about them here: [Great Guidebooks for Study Abroad](#) (www.AmeriSpan.net) Also, you will need some maps, right? Better to get them before your trip so you can study up a bit about where you will need to go once you get off that plane. [Maps.com](#) is the place to visit for all your map needs! (Hint: They sell guidebooks too, so you can do some one-stop-shopping if you like!)

iPods are also a great invention for travel. [MacMall](#) has great deals on iPods and accessories. Did you know that you can get an [iPod voice recorder](#) to record your classes and conversations? They are an excellent tool for studying abroad, as discussed in this article: [Study Abroad Tip: Voice Recorders](#)

Finally, no study abroad trip could possibly be complete without a digital camera, and possibly even a video camera. You can see lots of digital cameras at great prices at [Ritz Camera](#), and [The Flip](#) makes very small, cute, quality, inexpensive video cameras. In fact, AmeriSpan offers a rebate for [video bloggers](#)! For all your camera accessory needs, check out [LaptopsForLess](#).

Step 9: Health & Well-Being

AmeriSpan's Golden Rules for Study Abroad

Golden Rule #3: Respect your hosts.

If you are going to miss a meal, inform your host family before they have cooked the meal. If you will be out late, tell your family so that they don't worry.

Golden Rule #4: Take the differences in stride.

If everything were exactly the same as what you are used to, where would the fun be? A few weeks or months with some inconvenience makes you appreciate your own life in a different way. More importantly, think of all the great stories you'll have!

It is a good idea to check with the Centers for Disease Control prior to your trip to make sure you are up-to-date on all immunizations required for the country you are traveling to. The CDC website is www.CDC.org Also, you can check with the State Department for any Travel Warnings or Alerts at www.State.gov. A good site for general study abroad help is www.StudentsAbroad.state.gov More tips:

- ☐ Gets lots of exercise. Drink plenty of water (bottled water if you are traveling to somewhere where the tap water is not to be ingested, like a third world country).
- ☐ Don't drink too much alcohol! Remember that local spirits tend to be much stronger than what we are used to in the States. Be careful with your consumption.
- ☐ Do not do illegal drugs. Besides the legal ramifications, the drugs overseas can be much stronger or more lethal than those in the US. Avoid this altogether.
- ☐ Get lots of rest. If you do not get enough sleep, you will weaken your immune system and become unable to fight off sicknesses.
- ☐ Wear lots and lots of sunscreen if you are going to a sunny, warm climate! The sun is MUCH stronger in countries near the equator than it is here. Sun poisoning is no walk in the park, so make sure to reapply the sunscreen frequently, even on cloudy days.
- ☐ Use bug repellent to ward off any insect-borne diseases, not to mention discomfort.
- ☐ Be careful with the fruits and vegetables that you eat. Try to avoid unpeeled items, and always make sure to cook food thoroughly.
- ☐ Watch where you are going, and be aware at all times, particularly in countries that drive on the opposite side of the road! Drivers can be unpredictable, and you will want to avoid meeting their car with your face. Buckle up if possible when in cars.
- ☐ Avoid animals, especially wild animals. They may be cute, and you may think they are very exotic, and often, they are roaming free. This does not mean that they are safe to approach! Dogs in many countries are used for safety and protection, not as pets like in the US. Keep your distance.

Additional organizations for any other travel-safety and health info that you may need:

- ☐ World Health Organization: www.who.int
- ☐ International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers: www.iamat.org
- ☐ Overseas Citizens Emergency Center: (202) 501-4444 (overseas)
- ☐ American College Health Association: www.acha.org

PRE DEPARTURE TWO

Cultural Preparation and Tips to Help You Adjust While Abroad

Wherever you study abroad, you will experience some cultural adjustment. However, when you are participating in a language immersion program, this cultural adjustment is normally greater because you are living with a family who don't speak your native language. By immersing yourself in the culture, you will learn much more than vocabulary and verbs, you will learn how to communicate. In this section, you will learn the common cultural differences between the United States and Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.



In Latin America

The never say “I don’t know” mentality: In general people in Latin America try to be as helpful as possible. They don’t like to say they don’t know. The most common example is when you are asking for directions and get pointed in the wrong one. This is not intentional, the person is only trying to be helpful.

Quiet and peaceful households, a rarity: Whether it is dogs barking, roosters crowing, street noise, neighbors or relatives visiting or a señora banging around the kitchen making a meal, much of Latin America is just plain noisy. Get used to it, and if you are a light sleeper bring earplugs.

Reality check: things don’t always work: Telephones are still a rarity in much of Latin America and reliable telephones are practically unheard of. Don’t throw toilet paper in the toilet because it will get clogged. Be patient because, remember, you are on vacation.

Family that stays together, lives together: It is common for three generations of families to be living together under the same roof. It is a way to increase the household income and to help one another. Can you imagine living with all of your relatives every day?

Respect for the elders and parents is required and expected in Latino/Hispanic families. The family shares financial and emotional support with one another. Together the families provide support and protection for children and the elderly.

Macho, macho man...: Most Latin American men are proud of their machismo and view whistling at women as a compliment. Ladies, take it in stride or see above... about earplugs.

Different schedules and routines: In much of Latin America, lunch is the big meal of the day which causes business to close for an hour or two each afternoon. In some countries like Argentina, dinner is eaten at 10:30 or 11:00 at night. When in Rome do as the Romans do.

Cash is king, what’s plastic?: Sure, credit cards are accepted in Latin America, but not everywhere and usually with a 5-10% surcharge. If you want to live off plastic, use your credit card to get cash advances at the bank or at the ATM machines popping up everywhere.

Certain topics are taboo: Although nosiness is common, certain subjects are taboo i.e. abortion, casual sex, social politics, etc. Listen first to get the norms.

Political statements: In countries where there is political unrest, refrain from political comments and activities that might be construed as interference in the internal affairs of the host country. Don’t photograph or become involved in demonstrations.

And Don’t Forget . . .time takes time, lots of time: Punctuality may be a concept of the future. “*Hora Latina*” is different, enjoy it, don’t take it personally.

Language and communication in Latin America

Trust is an essential element of building relationships with Latinos/Hispanics. Once trust is established, Latinos/Hispanics are much more likely to reveal personal information. Latinos/Hispanics are more likely to trust and bond with a person rather than an agency or company.

- Latino/Hispanic culture is formal.
- When addressing someone you should use “Mr.” and “Mrs.”
- “Please” and “Thank you” are words used with everyone.
- To ignore someone is very rude. When you first see a person during the day, you must always recognize them and say “hello.” Before leaving, you should say “good-bye” and wish them well.
- Latinos/Hispanics prefer face-to-face human interaction.
- Respect is highly valued. To respect someone means to listen when he or she speaks and follow his or her advice. The elders have a special place in the community because of their wisdom and they are highly respected.

Religion and spirituality: Personal devotion to the church is important for many Latinos/Hispanics. They maintain strong beliefs. Catholicism is the primary religion, but more and more Latinos/Hispanics are converting to Protestant Christianity.

Education: To Latinos/Hispanics education includes not only what one learns in school, but also manners, behavior and religious beliefs. Education plays a very important role, as persons with higher degrees are respected for their knowledge.

Health care: Some Members of the Latino/Hispanic community still use traditional herbs or medications from their native homelands.

- The use of home remedies is a common practice in Latin American countries.
- Some countries use the traditional witch doctor called *curandero*.
- Latinos/Hispanics are not used to preventative medicine. They only go to the doctor when they are really sick.
- Mental Illness is viewed as “craziness,” and some people are reluctant to seek help because of fear of how their neighbors or families will react. Diabetes is a very common illness among the Latino/Hispanic population, and given the nutritional habits of the Latino/Hispanic culture, it is hard to control without very close supervision by professionals.

In Europe

Family definitions & flexible expectations: In Europe, it is not as common to have 3 generations of family members living together. In Spain/Portugal hosts tend to be a widow/widower, a divorcée, single parent or it could be an entire family of 5. Your experience with all can be just as rewarding! Western Europeans have a more reserved nature. It may take a while for your hostess/host to warm-up, be persistent and engage them in conversation. Going to your room or staying “out of their way” may be perceived as you don’t want to be bothered.

Reset your stomach-clocks: In Spain lunch is eaten between 1-4pm, and is usually the main meal of the day. The evening meal, dinner, is lighter and is served between 8 and 11pm.

Macho, macho man...: Even in Spain/Portugal you will need to take the whistling in stride. Men here are also proud of their machismo.

City chic: Europe is very cosmopolitan; Spaniards and Portuguese usually dress accordingly. In the cities dress is fairly formal (meaning no shorts, but nor do you need suits). You might want to bring something for special occasions or for the evening, as the nightlife is an integral part of everyday European life.

Driving & traffic regulations: Except in major cities and on super highways, avoid driving at night in Eastern Europe. Night driving can be hazardous because some roads are narrow and winding, and horse-drawn vehicles and bicycles may be encountered at any time on any road. Traffic regulations, especially those related to driving under the influence of alcohol, are very strict. An international driver’s license is usually accepted and, in some cases, required by Eastern European governments. www.aaa.com Also, be sure to look into if the country you are going to drives on the [left hand](#) side of the road.

Political statements: In countries where there is political unrest, refrain from political comments and activities that might be construed as interference in the internal affairs of the host country. Don’t photograph or become involved in demonstrations.

Photography restrictions in Eastern Europe: Refrain from photographing military and police installations and personnel as well as scene of civil disorder or other public disturbances. In some countries, also avoid photographing border areas and industrial structures, including harbors, bridges, rail and airport facilities. For more information, consult local authorities or the U.S. embassy or consulate in the country concerned.

Crime: One result of the changes taking place in Eastern Europe is an increase in street crime in the region. Car break-ins have become a problem. Some cities have groups of pickpockets that use various gimmicks to distract their victims. Be especially careful on public transportation, in crowded shopping areas, and in all places frequented by tourists. Watch your purse, passport, wallet, travel documents, and other valuables.

Loss of passport: In some locations means waiting 1+ days while local authorities process a new exit permit, which is mandatory to leave the country. It is strongly recommended that you make every effort to safeguard your U.S. passport from loss or theft. Carry a copy of your passport data page with you separate from your passport.

In the Middle East

Family and honor: Throughout the Middle East, family and honor are possibly the two most important cultural aspects. It is important that you are always respectful to those who treat you with respect and that you do your best to accept generous offerings (to a certain extent) as it can be considered rude to refuse. When in discussion, Middle Eastern people will most often side together and it is important not to press any issue to the point of offense.

Women in society: A woman's role in society in the modern Middle East can vary depending on location. Major cities may show greater leniency towards women in power but it is important to remember that traditional roles of a woman are still limited. It is also important to respect those around you by dressing properly in public. Clothing should always cover the shoulders and fall below the knee as not to disrespect the general public around you.

Politics: Political issues are rife throughout the Middle East and often debated freely. As a Westerner it may be wise to shy away from such conversations as certain opinions may offend your company.

Religion: Islam is the foremost religion throughout the Middle East and entails designated prayers throughout the day and vigorous Religious holiday celebrations. While you are never expected to partake in Religious happenings it is very important to be respectful of those who do. In many cases, to dishonor their religion is to dishonor their existence... the result of which does not make for a comfortable vacation.

Israel: A taboo topic throughout most of the Middle East, it is key to remember that many regions do not consider Israel a state so much as 'occupied Palestine.' If you are traveling through Israel at all, it is wise to avoid presenting authorities with any documents containing Israeli Visa stamps as they may not respond favorably (Israeli authorities are aware of this and willing to provide separate documents if they are informed in advance).

Homosexuality and public display of affection (PDA): Much of the Middle East is still very conservative in the Social arena, especially in public. Therefore, it is advisable to refrain from overtly passionate behavior when in public or any flirting with locals. To dishonor a woman or insinuate adultery is still punishable by death in certain regions. Homosexuality as well is not to be discussed or displayed in a public setting as it too is highly punishable under state laws.

Political statements: In countries where there is political unrest, refrain from political comments and activities that might be construed as interference in the internal affairs of the host country. Don't photograph or become involved in demonstrations.

In Asia

Host families: Families can range from parents with their children to having three generations living in the same home.

Customs in business: Seniority is very important. Instead of addressing the other party as Mr. or Mrs., it is always appropriate to address the other party by his designation i.e. Chairman, Director or Manager. When giving out name cards, business cards, make sure you start with the most senior person before moving down the line. Also ensure that you are handing them the card with both hands and remember that the card you are giving must face the recipient. Gifts are always appreciated if you are meeting someone for the first time, make sure the senior people get a better gift or at least gifts perceived to have a higher value than their junior staff. Formal dinners are common in business situations and may include drinking, karaoke etc. It is impolite to refuse to take part in this. If your business acquaintances are hosts for the night, all bills will be picked up by them for the night, including all entertainment. It is impolite to fight for the bill or worst, split the bills. Similarly, if you are the host, you are expected to pick up all bills for the night.

The concept of 'saving face': Face has to do with the image or credibility of the person you are dealing with. You should never, insult, embarrass, shame, yell at or otherwise demean a person. If you do, they will lose "face." Awareness of face and its impact is an extremely important cultural issue. In the business world, negotiations should be conducted to assure that the person at the other end of the table maintains face even if the deal should not successfully conclude. Face shows up in many ways and really begins early in life. Chinese children learn it as they are growing up. Parents will not discipline by saying "bad girl" or "naughty boy." They will discipline with "no" or "wrong". As the child grows, face creates a strong pressure for an individual to excel. Because this is such an important issue, you need to train yourself to recognize where this can become an issue, and to avoid having your contact lose face.

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Traditional Greetings in Asia

Thailand - The traditional Thai greeting is called the *wai*. In general, the younger person greets first, by placing the palms together at chest level and bowing slightly. The higher the placement of the fingertips, the greater the respect; the highest *wais* are reserved for monks and royalty. If someone should *wai* you, it is polite to *wai* back (except to children.)

China - Bowing or nodding is the common greeting; however, you may be offered a handshake. Wait for the Chinese to offer their hand first.

India - *Namaste*, for an Indian it's a way common way of greeting outsiders and elders. Both palms placed together and raised below the face shows respect for others.

Nepal - You may accept a handshake offered by both sexes, male or female, but never offer your hand first to women. Hand shakes are more gentle not strong, so don't feel the person isn't interested, it's just their way. The traditional greeting is called *namaskar*. *Namaskar* is a slightly more formal version of *namaste*. When spoken to another person, it is commonly accompanied by a slight bow made with hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointed upwards, in front of the chest. This gesture, called *Añjali Mudrā*, can also be performed wordlessly and carries the same meaning. In Indian and Nepali culture, the word is spoken at the beginning of written or verbal communication. However, upon departure, only the wordless hands-folded gesture is made. Its considered rude for a man to touch a women even shaking a hand, especially married women.

Japan - Bows can be generally divided into three main types: informal, formal, and very formal. Informal bows are made at about a fifteen degree angle and more formal bows at about thirty degrees. Very formal bows are deeper. The most common greetings are *ohayō gozaimasu* or "good morning," used until about 11am but may be used at any time of day if it is the first occasion that day the two people have met; *konnichiwa* which is roughly equivalent to "good day" or "good afternoon" and is used until late afternoon; *konbanwa* or "good evening"; and *oyasuminasai* or "good night."

Taiwan - Greetings are formal and the oldest person in a group is always greeted first. Handshakes are the most common form of greeting with foreigners and many Taiwanese look towards the ground as a sign of respect when greeting someone. You need not follow their example as they understand that westerners tend to smile warmly when introduced.

Korea - Greeting and saying thank you are very important to Koreans. These words are always said with a bow of the head. The depth of the bow depends on the relative seniority of the two speakers. As a related note, seniority grants one important/preferred status and respect in Korea. And, as such, you may often be asked somewhat personal questions about your age, education and marital status (sometimes-even wealth), these questions are not meant to pry or offend, just to determine your status and how you should be addressed.

In Africa

When traveling through Africa it is very important to respect local traditions. There are so many customs and cultures that it's smart to observe the people around you and try to follow their conduct. In general modesty and respect are the most honored social habits.

Clothing statements: Please be respectful with this issue, especially in Muslim countries. It is not acceptable for people, especially foreign women to wear revealing clothing. For women this means no low-cut shirts or even shorts. For men this means keeping your shirt on.

Greeting: It is very important to greet someone before speaking to them. Ask how they are doing, about their family, animals, etc. before getting to the topic at hand. Family and community, as topics of conversation, are much more important than material possessions or personal interests.

Which hand? In many countries the right hand is used for eating while the left hand is used for wiping. This means always shake and pass things with your right hand.

Who's paying? When inviting someone to a social event it is expected that the person doing the inviting will pay for everything. Be careful not to be rude by trying to go Dutch.

In public: Great displays of anger, or being loud, is not advised. Generally drinking alcohol and smoking in public are looked down upon or illegal. Just pay attention to who's around you. If you notice that everyone is joining in the fun it's probably OK.

Catcalling: Women should be prepared for catcalling by men. This is usually harmless. Just ignore it.

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Ghana: When greeting a group of people in Ghana it is important to greet all members present and shake hands going right to left; never left to right. Never shake with you left hand or touch the back of your hand to someone's palm, this is considered an insult.

Kenya: Try not to point at anyone, as this is considered rude. The best way to indicate something or someone is to nod your head in their direction.

Tanzania: Don't be offended if no one thanks you for anything, it's just not the custom.

PRE-DEPARTURE THREE

AmeriSpan's Tips for Learning a Language and Immersion Abroad

Whether you know ZERO vocabulary or you are an advanced speaker in your target language, a little preparation can help you get the most out of your immersion program. [How to Learn Any Language](#), an eBook that we recommend, is full of good advice on specifically helping Americans to learn new languages. On the next page are some pointers from AmeriSpan Study Abroad's experienced staff members about expectations, goals, ways to build your vocabulary, and tips on how to get by if you suddenly forget every word you learned in your new language.



Language Immersion Tips

Set realistic goals: Learning another language isn't easy (for most of us); it takes time, practice and many mistakes. Go into a program with the goal of increasing your communication skills! Never assume that you are going to perfect the language in so many weeks or months, it's too much pressure!

Bolster your vocabulary: If you are an absolute beginner, consider studying up with some language software, or get a phrase book and learn some basics like : "Please", "Thank you", "Where is . . .", "How much. . .", etc. Knowing these phrases and some hand gestures will get you by in a crunch. For intermediate or advanced speakers, we recommend learning as much vocabulary as possible before you go, including common idioms. Your language instruction will focus mainly on grammar, conversation and listening. The more vocabulary you have going into the program, the more ways you will get to apply the language. All participants should bring a comprehensive dictionary (not only a pocket dictionary) and may want to consider a guide book that has a section listing local colloquialisms.

Be able to conjugate important verbs: Learn to conjugate, COLD, those really important verbs like to wish/want, to be able/can, to be and to go. These kinds of verbs conjugated in the present or past combined with infinitives instantly increase your ability to communicate. If you are an absolute beginner focus on the "I" and "you" forms of the really important verbs.

Think the language: Don't try and translate everything word for word. It doesn't work! You will drive your self crazy looking for a word that may not exist in the target language. Recognize the fact that grammar rules will be different. Learn the differences along with the similarities and your understanding of how the language works will increase ten-fold!

When in doubt, "Literature-ize": Try using "larger" words. For example, in Spanish, need doesn't translate but necessity turns into "*necesidad*", requisite becomes "*requisito*" and exigency blossoms into "*exigencia*." Since these words sound very similar, you will be understood. There are examples like these in many languages.

Romance languages are similar: If you know another romance language, you have a leg up on learning Spanish or Portuguese. You already know the concept of masculine and feminine words, accent marks, etc. Many words ending in Y like liberty will end with: "ad" in Spanish, "e" in French, "ade" in Portuguese or "à" in Italian. Similarly, words ending in "ion" in English often sound alike, and mean the same thing in Spanish.

Stay open minded: The best tool for learning a language at any level is a good attitude. Understanding the culture helps language acquisition. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, they are great to learn from and can be funny too! A sense of humor really helps.

Get ready, get set, go... In preparation for your trip we have compiled important advice, useful resources and helpful hints for you to use as you prepare for your travels. www.amerispan.com/getready.asp

