The First 48 hours of Studying Abroad

Excitement is running high when it is time for a study abroad program to begin. Starting off on the right foot is key to keeping that feeling going while you embark on what can be a long excursion to your new home. Here are a few things to think about to help make a smooth transition to your new normal…

**The Airport**: Here is where you begin. To get started on the right foot, remember to look into baggage guidelines for ALL of your flights including connecting ones in other countries, look at exactly what is allowed in your carry-on bag (let’s talk about carry-ons some more!), flights are weather dependent and can change quickly, know how to look up changes for your flight and how they will affect your later connections, and once you are through security you can take your food and drink on the plane so grab a snack if you are worried about in-flight meals.

**Carry-on Luggage/Personal Bag:** Nobody wants to plan on losing their luggage but it happens. Having all of your essentials for at least 48 hours can help reduce the stress of waiting on luggage once in country. Things to have in your carry-on: 2-3 complete changes of clothes, a spare pair of shoes, all needed medications, small versions of your toiletries, all legal documents (passport, visa, and identification), print outs of where you are going with phone numbers and addresses in the local language, **enough local currency to last a few days (think of everything you could possibly need cash for**), and a lightweight jacket. Run through your day, if you could not easily replace it, keep it with you instead of under the plane.

**Transportation to your hotel/hostel/dorm:** Some programs offer a service to get you to the group, that’s great! As mentioned above though, flights can get changed quickly. Look up ahead of time how to get to your group whether that is by train, bus, taxi, or on foot and have a plan in place.

**Communication:** Set-up a clear but realistic plan for communicating back home that you have arrived. Keep in mind, you might not have a local SIM card yet to put in your cell phone for a day or so. Wifi will be your best friend in the beginning. Know which services you can use on your phone over wifi and make sure somebody at home has the corresponding app (iMessage, WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger). A trusted individual having your flight information can also be helpful so that they can check your flight status on their own. Also be sure to research how to charge your device while in country. Small rechargeable battery packs can be lifesavers while you get adjusted to life with converters/adapters.

**Stress Management:** Knowing how you deal with stress personally can help you prepare in advance. Things may go smoothly or may be a complete disaster. Take a moment to think about the situation. It is only temporary. You will get your luggage, and you will get to your destination. Keep this in mind and try to cope with stressors along the way knowing that it will all work out in the end. Knowing in advance that this a time for things to be ever changing can help when things do go a bit sideways.

**Jet lag/Sleep:** Getting yourself adjusted can be difficult especially when there can be a 12 hour time difference. Look into different ways to best cope. While adjusting to their time is important, listen to your body. If you need to take a rest, do not be afraid to do so. We often hear about excitement taking over and students overdoing it slightly in those first few days. Set realistic time tables for yourself and remember to be flexible.

**Contacts in Country:** When you are in country, it may not be practical any more to contact the Study Abroad Office for information. Someone on site may have the best information for you, and you should know who to get in contact with. This may be your faculty director, on-site affiliate partner, or exchange institution. Be sure to have all of these numbers with you at all times. We are always here to help, but there are times when others may be more helpful.

These are just a few tips for starting your program abroad off in the right direction. Please keep in mind that everybody’s experience is different. Research ahead of time is key and having a plan in place can help to relieve stressors to come. Remember most situations are temporary, and you will soon be busy learning about your new home and less worried about the travel inconveniences that have just happened.