

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



FOR PARENTS OF MEANINGFUL TRAVELERS

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GENERAL QUESTIONS

What are our roles as parents in helping our children select the right program?

Your goal as a parent should be to provide a framework for your child to choose an overseas program. Whether your kid falls on the spectrum of “GOTTA DO THIS ONE” or “I’m overwhelmed with choices” doesn’t matter, provided you are quick to offer support.

You can sit down with your kid as they peruse program options on their university’s website, on Google, or on [GoAbroad](#), give them pointers on things to consider (“Do you want to live with other Americans or with other international students? A homestay might be fun...”), be upfront about the budget and who is paying for what, etc. Needless to say, you won’t run out of dinner table conversations for quite some time.

Frame your conversations less on a tourist-focus and more on what they’ll gain from the experience as a holistic learning opportunity.

Rather than gushing about the Eiffel Tower lit up at night, encourage your child to think about befriending young French students and mastering their French accent. These tidbits help your kid to focus on what’s important in their experience abroad.

What are the benefits of going abroad?

We’re glad you asked! The benefits are numerous, but largely personal. Individuals return with a renewed sense of focus and self-awareness, perfect for tackling busy schedules and juggling multiple commitments and responsibilities. It often leads to increased motivation, making your kid a no-brainer hire in future job op’s. They’ll learn incredible soft skills, communication, conflict resolution, empathy, and sensitivity, not to mention a slew of hard skills (like problem solving or a foreign language).

Your child will see the good, bad, and ugly of the world in a safe and structured environment. Their independence will soar and their drive for the future will be clearer than ever. Return volunteers, students, interns, ESL teachers, etc. are natural leaders, primed to make a positive difference in the world community as well as their own.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [The Benefits of Internships Abroad](#)

My kid wants to take advantage of this opportunity to do some independent travel. When would you recommend doing so?

Awesome! Independent travel is a great way for your kid to exercise their newly-grown travel-savvy skills. Many choose to bookend their formal program with personal travels, either arriving in-country earlier than other program participants or sticking around at the end for a bit more fun.



Have your child look over their schedules to see if they can squeeze in any independent traveling mid-program. A quick four day jaunt to Cape Town or a weeklong excursion to Sydney might be just the injection of adventure your kid needs mid-program!

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [5 Tips for Traveling Alone](#)
- [6 Steps to More Meaningful and Adventurous Travel](#)

For study/volunteer/intern abroad: will all grades/credits be accepted by home universities?

This is not guaranteed, and something you should pay close attention to as you're sifting through program options.

For some students, credits don't really matter, perhaps they're using their trip abroad for elective credits rather than requirements. Maybe your kid is volunteering abroad or interning abroad and isn't that interested in getting college credit for either activity. Or maybe you secretly want your kid to stay in college for extra semesters.

More often than not though, students will want to aim to chip away at their degree while traveling. Inquire with the university program department chair and your kid's academic advisor to get a list of classes that are still needed before they turn the tassel. Compare these courses with what's on offer through the program provider or international university. Double and triple and quadruple check with your home institution that certain classes will be applicable for transfer, then fill out the paperwork and get it all in writing, ideally before your kid even sets foot abroad.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [Step-by-Step Guide to Get a New Program Approved by Your Study Abroad Office](#)

How long are most travel programs?

Travel programs for volunteering, teaching, studying, or interning abroad range in length from a week to a full on year or more! Most **students** choose to complete summer programs between semesters, which tend to last from 2-12 weeks. These programs are considered "short term" and are very conducive to travel ease. Another common choice is a semester program, which typically last 4-6 months. We know it sounds long, but dang it if it doesn't go by quick.

For **non-students**, programs can be completed year-round at their convenience. Full degree program lengths will vary but typically last 2+ years. Teaching posts at formal institutions follow foreign academic calendars, whereas tutoring can be completed based on availability. Volunteer programs can last as little as one week, and an international internship stint shouldn't last any less than a month.

A general rule of thumb: more time = more immersion = more learning = more value.



Does my child need a visa to go abroad?

Generally speaking, countries require foreign visitors to have a visa when entering their country. This can vary from a *student* visa to a *work* visa to a *tourist* visa. It largely depends on where you're coming from (your nationality) and where you're headed; some countries are more strict than others.

For instance, China requires visitors to secure an advance visa that costs a bit of money, while you can pick up your visa for Turkey in the airport. Point being that **the variance requires responsibility on your and your child's part to do research**, ask questions, and figure out what is the best visa for the type of traveling your kid is doing.

What other documents are needed to travel abroad?

Your child will need to have a passport with an expiration date that is more than one year away (i.e. if my passport expires July 2017, I'm already cutting it close and should renew it in advance). To get a passport, proof of identity must be present, such as an old passport, naturalization certificate, driver's license, military ID card, or other current government-issued ID.

Other important documents that aren't necessary but are generally helpful include:

- Photocopy of passport ID page
- Bank account info
- Exit flight info
- Student ID card (if applicable)
- A letter from your doctor for medications you are bringing
- Photocopy of insurance

While traveling, encourage your child to guard their photocopies as carefully as they would the originals.

HEALTH & SAFETY

How do I know if my child is doing OK?

Your communication with your child will vary throughout their time abroad. Depending on their schedules, your schedule, the time difference, classes, commitments, adventures, etc.; we gotta admit, it can be hard to nail down a regular time for check in's. But communication is important, and it's essential that you set realistic boundaries and expectations for your "new norm." Hint: texting daily isn't really one of them.

Other alternatives to feeling confident in your kid's well being, without being *THAT* dad with the frequent texts, is to connect with the program provider's social media channels. Programs have plenty of avenues for sharing with parents on-the-ground happening's. Seeing your child's sweet smiling face in their latest Tweet is just the warm fuzzy you're looking for!

Establish a relationship with your contacts at the program provider for regular updates, too. Then breathe.



And start to let go a little. Your kid is fine and having the time of their life!

How will I contact my child in case of an emergency?

The process for communicating with your child will differ from program to program, so this would be a great question for your contact at the program provider or university.

However, generally speaking, it will be fairly easy to contact your child while they're abroad. Thanks to the internet, sending a quick text message, Facebook message, or email to your kid will usually end up right in their pocket.

Keep in mind the time difference and that your child might be without WIFI access. In these instances, it is probably better to call the emergency line from the provider and let them get their wheels in motion for communicating with your kid.

My child has a food allergy/restriction. Should I be worried?

Make sure your child clearly understands how to handle their food allergies while traveling abroad. Depending on their destination, they may have to be extra careful OR can afford to be more lax (not a lot of lactose in China, for instance!). Regardless, your child should feel comfortable with using their EPI pens or other responses for when things go awry.

Communicate the allergy with the program provider and ensure the on-the-ground support staff/system is aware of the situation. If it is severe, make sure you clearly communicate that it could affect the lives of other program participants; for example, your child must room with others who are comfortable keeping tree nuts *out* of the kitchen or the house.

It's crucial that you alert the program provider the severity of the situation. Double check that their residential staff is equipped and comfortable with handling allergic reactions and that response plans are in place.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [Survival Kit: Studying Abroad With a Food Allergy](#)

What if my child becomes ill overseas?

That stinks but it does happen, and luckily for your kid, even though they won't have the comfort of your specific brand of "patting on the back" or ample supplies of soup to make it all go away, getting ill while abroad can actually be an important learning experience for you both. It makes your child more resilient. It makes them more appreciative of the care you've given them before. It makes them be vulnerable and lean on their new friends. It reminds them to be extra-careful when choosing street food dinner options.



We recommend that your child carries a credit card for medical emergencies in the off-chance they'll need to go to get immediate care while in another country.

Hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies are readily available abroad. Program providers will have plans in place to check in on your student, accompany them to the doctor, give reports to the parents, etc. If a situation arises where your child will need to be evacuated and returned home, we have a hunch the program provider will also have a process for coordinating this transition in the best way possible.

Still want a bit more confidence in the process? Ask the program provider for all these dirty details.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [How to Avoid Food Poisoning When Studying Abroad](#)
- [How To Prepare & Deal With An Emergency Abroad](#)

Does my child need insurance to go abroad?

Though not required, we generally encourage parents to invest in travel insurance for their children as they travel. There are various levels of coverage and costs. Travel insurance generally covers catastrophes, evacuations, lost luggage, changed flights, medical reimbursements, etc., but each plan varies and should be carefully considered prior to purchasing.

MONEY MATTERS

How much will going abroad cost?

Going abroad can cost anywhere from next-to-nothing (did somebody say ~~McDonalds~~ full ride scholarship?) to thousands of dollars.

For Study/Degree/Internship Abroad Programs

- **Weigh financial options.** It's essential that you chat with your child's program advisor to learn about all of their program options. This can range from:
 - **Third party providers** – can be cheaper than a semester program.
 - **Directly enrolling in a foreign university** – typically cheaper, but offers less support system and credit transfer is not guaranteed.
 - **Faculty-led** – a short-term program with other students from your child's university, likely led by a faculty member from there as well.
 - **University program** – you pay the same amount of a semester of tuition at the domestic institution as for their trip abroad (excluding flights, visas, and other incidental costs).
- **Financial aid.** Your kid's scholarships might only be applicable when doing a pre-approved or university run program. Double check the fine print so that you're not expecting a reimbursement that never comes.



- **Literally “shop” for options.** Providers might offer identical programs at varying dollar amounts. It’s up to YOU to be the savvy, research-oriented consumer that we all know you are.
- **Academic credits.** If your goal is to stay on track for graduation or minimizing extraneous costs, make sure your kid’s program credits will transfer (and count) at their home university. This can make or break the financial investment of any given program.

For Teach/Work Abroad Programs

- **Up front costs.** You’re likely paying a program fee to cover your upfront transition to life abroad. You’ll also be paying for access to a providers’ network of job openings and for connecting you to those openings. After your first few weeks, your need for a provider may decrease.
- **TEFL certification.** While it may cost a few hundred dollars up front, having a TEFL certification will aptly prepare you for your job. Not only will you gain access to more competitive, well-paying teaching positions, but you’ll also enjoy a higher return on investment than if you go in sans skills and training.
- **Salaries.** Since you’ll be working abroad, you will be paid for the hours you put in. The longer you stay, the more your investment in housing and flights and other costs associated with your move will pay off.
- **Hot Markets for Teaching English Abroad.** Generally speaking, Asia and the Middle East offer the highest paid teaching positions abroad. Jobs in Latin America, Europe, North America, and the South Pacific will be more of a “break even” deal.

For Volunteer/Internship Abroad Programs

- **Access to their network.** Many have rightfully questioned the need to pay money to work or volunteer for free. What you’re essentially getting out of the payment is 24/7 support, structured projects, and access to a network of pre-vetted organizations and opportunities that you would otherwise have a helluva time researching independently.
- **Consider safety & your child’s comfort level.** If you feel uncomfortable with your child living without a pre-established support system while abroad, consider organizing a program to last the entire length of their stay. If this is your child’s first experience living and working abroad or in this country, paying the extra money for added safety will be a worthwhile investment.
- **Find scholarships.** There are plenty of unique scholarships for volunteering or interning abroad specifically – even for non-traditional “students” or older program participants.

Money Advice for Any Type of Program

- **Consider location.** If your child is dead set on studying in Paris and won’t even *budge* to consider cheaper Lyon or Nice, tough luck. But the reality is cosmopolitan cities and developed countries tend to be more expensive (here’s looking at you, England-Australia-USA). So not only does the *country* choice make a difference, but the *location within country* too.
- **Remember: it’s an investment.** Writing that fat check might make you sweat a little, but keep in mind: this experience, much like college itself, is a short-term financial loss for long-term personal and professional gain. Your child is going to grow leaps and bounds, and you can’t put a price tag on that.
- **Extra little costs that add up.** While tuition, room, and board might already seem like a bit of a financial drag, keep in mind ancillary costs like equipment (a backpack and a camera!), flights (no middle seats please!), visas and passports (zZzzZZz!), and souvenirs.



In the end, the cost will ultimately depend on the program your kid chooses and the destination your kid chooses.

How much spending money should I give my kid?

This is a toughie because it will ultimately depend on the destination your child is traveling abroad to. Certain destinations are more expensive than others by default. Rather than deciding and giving your kid a hard number, have an open conversation. What do they plan to spend money on? Will they be eating out a lot? Doing adventurous activities? Trying to visit a new city every weekend? Clothes, food, drinks?

Involve your child in the budget-making process and allow them to flesh out an idea of their expected expenses.

Talk to them about choices – both ones they make now with their monies (i.e. save your paycheck rather than blowing it on a Starbucks pink drink!) and how they can find budget-friendly ways to have fun abroad (like WALKING around your new city!).

Since traveling abroad is an investment, it's important that you invite your child into the process of budgeting and planning finances for their experience. In fact, you'd be doing your kid a *disservice* by footing the entire bill and having little expectations for their contributions.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- [6 Tips to Create \(& Stick to\) Your Study Abroad Budget](#)
- [The 7 Keys To Budget Travel](#)

How can I help my kid raise money for the trip?

There are many ways you and your child can work together to creatively offset the pending costs of their trip abroad. Encourage your child to think outside the box. Try your luck at an old-fashioned garage sale or bake sale. Ask your place of worship to donate money on your behalf. Call up the Bank of Aunt Richie and Uncle Rich for a loan.

Have you ever tried crowdfunding online? Resources like [FundMyTravel](#) make it easy to connect with donors and raise money for meaningful travel online.

Are there scholarships/funding available to help with international travel expenses?

Absolutely! And we've got just the resources you need to start your scholarship search.

- [GoAbroad.com/Scholarships-Abroad](#) is our one-of-a-kind scholarship database for international travel
- [GoAbroad.com/Articles/Scholarships-Abroad](#) features expert articles specifically geared towards scholarship seekers



If you'd like to try a more modern approach to raising funds for your child's trip, consider launching a personalized [FundMyTravel](#) campaign, an online fundraising platform that allows individuals in your network to donate money to support your kid's travels.

[Study abroad loans](#) exist, though they are harder to obtain than a traditional scholarship. Inquire with the program provider to learn of any untapped financial resources.

Will there be unanticipated costs?

As with anything in life, unanticipated costs will sneak their way into your account statement. Your best bet is to be proactive in identifying such costs and to significantly budget for them in advance.

Some potential unexpected costs include:

- Internet/WIFI (it's not always free abroad, tear)
- Laundry (expect to shell out \$8-\$10 per load)
- Down payments on apartments (can be anywhere from 1-3 months advance pay)
- ATM and credit card fees (thumbs down)
- Miscellaneous phone charges (you *knew* you shouldn't be late-night texting your ex)

Talk about these potential financial setbacks with your kid to help them mentally (and physically!) prepare for unforeseen expenses.

How can my child access money while abroad?

Many students choose to withdraw money from their international bank accounts at ATMs while abroad. The cost of these conveniences can add up, and parents should consider choosing a debit card that minimizes withdrawal fees from out-of-network ATMs.

Another option to consider are **credit cards**. If your child is going to a developing country, paying with a credit card might be a cheap and safe course of action. However, this isn't always an option when you're traveling in primarily cash-economies. Do a bit of research on the region they're headed *prior* to ensure you're choosing the most practical financial approach.

The length of your child's stay abroad will influence how they handle their finances. If it's a long stay, you might encourage them to open a foreign bank account to hold large withdrawals from their international accounts in the local currency. If it's short term, you might consider sending your kid with your national currency in cash for exchanges. This isn't a terrible process, but waiting in loooong bank lines for exchanges can be a serious headache (and waste of time) in foreign countries.

Most importantly, have **backup options** for money, as you never want your kid to be without access to cash for more than 48 hours or so.



Where can my kid exchange money?

Wherever your child is traveling, surefire locations for currency exchange are the national bank and the airport, particularly if it is a major port. Travelers should not feel confident in exchanging ALL currencies (for instance, I had a hard time finding somewhere to take my Vietnamese *dong* outside of Vietnam).

Encourage your child to exchange any leftover cash monies back to USD or your national currency prior to returning home.

Airport exchange rates tend to be higher but more convenient, especially for first-time arrivals. Encourage your child to have some “breathing room” in their first days abroad by exchanging \$100 at the airport – this allows them pocket cash and ample time to locate the nearest banks or ATMs in their new digs.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [The 1-2-3 of Foreign Currency: When & How To Exchange](#)

ABOUT LIFE ABROAD

How should I talk to my kid about dressing appropriately and why does it matter?

Every culture has a different norm for what men and women should wear. While we’re not telling your kid to put a sari on immediately after landing in India, you should discuss appropriate dress with kid within the confines of their personal comfort levels. Showing respect to a culture through appropriate dress can be a profound learning experience. Not only will you gain some unusual tan lines, but you’ll also gain the mutual respect of the locals and leave a positive impression of your home country.

It’s important from a safety perspective, too. Vagrants might be on the lookout for unsuspecting foreigners wearing fancy jewelry or designer clothes. Seeing your daughter’s shoulders or your son’s knees might make them think they’re, uh, “open for business.”

Generally speaking, leave the tank tops at home. Tiny dresses, no. Booty shorts? Scrap ‘em. Low hanging pants that show off your Bart Simpson boxers? Leave them in their drawers at home. **If you wouldn’t wear it around your hyper-conservative and old-school (yet loveable!) Grandma, best bet is to not wear it abroad either.**

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [How to Pack for a Multi-Cultural Study Abroad Experience](#)
- [15 Ways to Maintain Modesty Abroad](#)



What are the housing options?

Different programs will offer different accommodations for participants; if your child has a particular preference, it's important they use it as a filter when considering programs. Generally speaking, these are the most popular housing options while abroad:

For Study/Degree/Intern Programs

- **On-Campus Dormitories.** If your child is attending classes at a university abroad, they might consider living in the international students dormitory. They'll make tons of new friends, have 24/7 security, and be in the thick of university life.
- **Off-Campus Apartments.** A short walk or commute from campus are the oft-cheaper apartment options for students. Providers might place students with other participants in pre-furnished housing OR your child can opt to go the independent route and secure their own housing.
- **Homestays With Local Families.** A tried-and-true method for deep cultural immersion and increased foreign language proficiency, homestays are an excellent option for students. The extra security and comfort meals provided make for a well-rounded international experience.
- **Hotels.** If you're trying to rack up points or hate making your own bed, consider placing your child in a hotel for the duration of their program. Though expensive, this might be a good option for students only staying for a week or two.
- **Hostels.** These grungy, loveable community centers excel at bringing people together (community!) and experiencing the world on a dime (budget-friendly!). They're not all as scary or dingy as Hollywood would lead us to believe, and are a more-affordable alternative to hotels for short-term trips.

For Volunteer/Intern Programs

- **Volunteer Housing.** Some organizations will have accommodations set-up in advance for volunteers. This can range from camping to cabins to the upstairs of an old farmhouse.
- **Homestays.** As with study abroad students, volunteers who opt to live with local families will be afforded insights rarely gifted to foreign travelers.
- **Apartments.** If you're volunteering in the big city, you might secure housing independently in a nearby flat/apartment.

For Teach/Work Programs

- **Provided Housing.** Many contracts for teaching English abroad or short term work include housing as a perk. These apartments are typically well-vetted and located – not to mention roommate free.
- **Self-organized.** If your kid's work contract does not including housing placements, help your child scour local classifieds for other options. Ask the provider for insider tips on the best real estate about town.

No matter what you ultimately choose, ideally it will be organized *prior* to your child's trip. Since this is not always possible, it is advised to reserve a few night's stay at a hotel or hostel to allow for a stress-free transition.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [Student Apartment or Homestay Family? 5 Tips for Housing](#)
- [Study Abroad Housing: Is One Better Than the Other?](#)

Who is responsible for making travel arrangements?

Generally speaking, the responsibility of coordinating travel plans falls on the student (and you!). Your program provider might offer specifications, such as “They have to arrive in *this* airport” and they must land on this particular day. Be sure to honor their requests to avoid unnecessary hassle when your kid embarks on their journey!

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [How To Find Cheap Flights: When, How, & Where](#)

What are the common modes of transportation while abroad?

Great question. Many countries rely on a combination of cars, taxis, buses, trains, subways, bicycles, motorbikes, pedicabs, and their own two feet to get from point A to point B.

What’s that? It sounds just like home? Yup, you’re right! Though Uber might not be as easy to come by, most foreign transportation options are pretty standard. Your child might take more buses than usual or master an underground subway system – **all awesome survival skills in the grand scheme of things.**

Don’t get us wrong, there are some unique options out there, such as dala dalas, donkey carts, and boats. Remind your kid to practice street smarts whenever choosing a form of transportation. Money is no option when safety is on the line.

What will the food be like?

The food options will vary depending on the destination of your child’s trip. Your child should be go into the experience knowing their tummies will be exposed to new spices, ingredients, vegetables, oils, fruits, meats (duck feet?), breads, and preparation methods. Some will be delicious, some might make your kid go *ack*. Your child should be open to trying new things and experiencing their new homes through their fork and knife.

Sometimes, foods in other countries will be more simple and pragmatic than the extravagance and variety (and luxury) we’re afforded in our own countries.

Remind your child to be grateful for the fuel and to not complain for *lack*. They’ll be reunited with their favorite burrito soon enough. Access to familiar foods from home, for better or worse, is common in major cities around the world. You can’t escape the Golden Arches for long! And who knew that the Chinese LOVE KFC? If your kid just can’t go a week without a home-cooked biscuit, they’re in luck.



If your child has a sensitive stomach, encourage them to cook for themselves and grocery shop whenever possible. Adjusting to new foodstuffs can take a few hours to a few days (or even longer in extreme situations). If they do end up with some traveler's diarrhea, remind them to drink lots of water and follow the BRAT diet for a few days.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [Foodie Fun Articles](#)

COMMUNICATION

How can I keep in touch with my child?

While you may not be able to have as many face-to-face check in's as usual, you'll probably keep in touch with your kid the same way as when they're off at school or vacationing with a friend: text messages, emails, Facebook messages, Facetime calls, Instagram comments, etc. Your kid will likely have access to internet while abroad, some more than others, so it will entirely depend on their availability, interest, and access.

OR you can kick it old school and send them letters and packages to their new address. It can be a bit of a hassle and a little expensive, but the smile on their faces when they get these treats/reminders of home is truly priceless.

Will my child be able to communicate without having a firm grasp of the language?

You'd be surprised how far individuals can get with miming, smiling, writing down, speaking slowly, etc. While we always encourage travelers to **make a conscious and honest effort to learn the basics of their destination's native language**, it is unrealistic to ask your kid to master French, German, Italian, AND Spanish for their semester abroad in London.

Since you're reading this, we're going to go ahead and assume that you have the privilege of being an English speaker. English affords you travel opportunities and comforts at levels that other languages simply don't. No matter where you go, an English-speaker is rarely far away. And in the rare situation where an English speaker isn't nearby, your kid will have to use that noggin for creative problem solving skills. ← Trust us, these stories turn into great laughs in the future.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [Why & How to Learn Your Host Country's Language While Studying Abroad](#)
- [Tips for Language Learning Abroad](#)

Should my child take their cell phone?

Have a candid conversation with your child about what they're hoping to get out of their time abroad and how their cell phone might help/detract from their ability to reach those goals. It is not unusual for students to live abroad without their phone, as oftentimes service restrictions and calling plans don't allow for international calling. However, there are plenty of other means of communication, including calling cards and the internet.



In general, we strongly encourage travelers to unplug and decompress from their cell phone addictions while abroad.

Leave that dead weight behind – instead, appreciate what’s around you and avoid the temptation to disengage through thumb-fluttering text messages and unnecessary image posts. Or chatting with your parents!

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- [Tuning Out & Tuning In: The Benefits of Studying Abroad WITHOUT Technology](#)

WANT TO KEEP READING?

RELATED ARTICLES FOR PARENTS

- [How to Empower Your Kid to Have a Successful Experience Abroad](#)
- [Your Child is Overseas. Now What?](#)
- [6 Things You Should Know About Volunteering with Your Children Abroad](#)
- [All Articles for Parents](#)

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