

# MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

PARENTS OF TEEN TRAVELERS



An Initiative to Make Travel More Accessible



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# WHY WE CREATED THIS BOOK FOR PARENTS OF TEEN TRAVELERS

## A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



**Being the parent of a teen traveling abroad for the first time is overwhelming and no one knows that better than we do.** That's why we scoured our expert articles directory to come up with a comprehensive resource of tips so you can help your child make the most of their time abroad (and put your nerves to rest!).

Have they picked a program? What are their first steps? Most importantly, how can you help? 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.

The list of questions to ask before your teen prepares to go abroad just gets longer and longer the more you think about it. But, we've already thought about it. In fact, at GoAbroad we've thought about it for 20+ years in the field, and we've learned a thing or two in all that time.

As part of GoAbroad's mission to provide the best and most comprehensive resources for meaningful travelers, our writers share their best tips for parents of teen travelers every step of the way— from choosing a program to helping your teen survive reverse culture shock.

While it can be nerve-wracking to let your child go, helping them through their journey will be beneficial to you both. Everyone deserves the opportunity to travel, and GoAbroad is dedicated to providing everyone with the tools, knowledge, and confidence they need to do so.

Interested in joining this initiative? [Partner with us!](#)

# OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**Joel Tan** began his professional life as a reporter for a major Asian newspaper. It was during his stint as the paper's technology editor that he won an award for best science and technology reporting for his series on biotechnology and its effects on human health and development. Joel has traveled throughout Asia. When he isn't busy with technology projects, Joel dabbles in blogging about travel and technology, and tweaking WordPress themes.



**Mariel Tavakoli** is a graduate of the College of William and Mary where she studied public policy and sociology. She fell in love with meaningful travel as a study abroad student in the Czech Republic, where she returned as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant after graduation. Mariel is dedicated to all things international exchange and spends her free time learning languages and always planning her next trip.



**Charleen Johnson Stoeber** is an introverted lover of dragon fruit juice. She loves sitting with Nicaraguan children on the side of the street while patiently breaking down North American stereotypes. With a short haircut and watermelon shaped earrings, she is passionate about mental health and the rewards that come with vulnerable travel. Not only does she write for five different blogs, she also teaches art and English classes in the mountains of Nicaragua.



← This could be you! Want to share your own travel tips and tales? [Give us a shout!](#)

# TOP REASONS YOUR CHILDREN SHOULD STUDY ABROAD

By: Joel Tan

A university education does not come cheap. But if you want your child to have access to better employment opportunities, you may just have to grin and bear the costs. Or do you? One option that you may have avoided considering because you have always expected it to be a pricier option is sending your child on a study abroad program. Although study abroad programs can come with a larger price tag, they are not one stop shops. Academic credit is not the only thing your student will gain from studying abroad. Therefore, the positive impact of international education in the long run will far outweigh its impact on your wallet.

## Studying abroad will do wonders for their resumé's.

With more and more companies going global, marketing their products and services online, or setting up offices in other countries across the world, employers are more likely to hire a candidate with international experience. International experience will illustrate their unique ability to adapt to new environments, maintain cultural sensitivity, and deal with challenging circumstances.



## Studying abroad will improve their language skills.

Nothing boosts a student's confidence while studying abroad the way mastering the local language can. One of the greatest obstacles to making the most out of a study abroad experience is the inability to communicate with the local people in their native tongue. With this obstacle in front of them and locals all around them, your children will have even more motivation to expand their language skills, and they will be forced to just go for it on a daily basis.

## Studying abroad will give them a greater appreciation for their own culture and way of life.

As we grow up, we end up taking a lot of things for granted, including the culture that has nurtured us through the years, the luxuries we have been given, and the people who have helped us become who we are today. By immersing themselves in a culture that is different from our own and being thrown into a completely unfamiliar place, study abroad students will find themselves appreciating the life they have back home more and more (this is especially true for students who decide to study abroad in developing countries).

## Studying abroad will provide an unparalleled experience.

Armchair traveling does not get you far, and pales in comparison to actually experiencing a country's culture, eating the food, speaking the language, and meeting local people on a day-to-day basis for consecutive weeks, months, or full semesters (and years!). The oft-mentioned phrase "experience is the best teacher" may be cliché, but it certainly holds true for study abroad programs. Sending your child on a study abroad program will definitely provide an extraordinary experience that would in no way be possible to the same degree at home, and when they return you will notice this experience has a major impact on his or her life...

**"There are still a lot of experiences and lessons out there that can't quite be quantified, explained in a book, or taught in a classroom."**





### Studying abroad will lead to more opportunities.

Aside from opportunities once they are back at home and finish their degree program, like increased chance of employment, windows will also open for your children while they are still studying abroad. Allow them to spread their wings by visiting other destinations, taking up an internship in tandem with their study abroad program, and try new things during their time abroad. Letting them study abroad and make their own decisions will give them a sense of ownership and responsibility over their trip and make them return a more independent young adult (we know this can be hard to accept though!).

### Studying abroad will change your child's life, and yours!

Now is the time to introduce your child to the idea of study abroad and share with them all the valuable resources you can to ensure they choose the right program for them and that they make the most of their time abroad. The idea of study abroad could turn into a life of possibilities for your child, and you could be the one to initiate the life changing moment!

### Here are Six Study Abroad Program Providers to Get you Started:

Here are Six Study Abroad Program Providers to Get you Started:

1. [CAPA International Education](#)
2. [SPI Study Abroad](#)
3. [Adelante International Internships & Study Abroad](#)
4. [IES Abroad](#)
5. [Academic Programs International \(API\)](#)
6. [International Studies Abroad \(ISA\)](#)



# A PARENTS GUIDE TO CHOOSING A STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

By: Mariel Tavakoli

Your child has won you over with their arguments and enthusiasm to study abroad this upcoming semester, summer, or winter break. Now together, you may be looking at the thousands of destinations and program options with a trepidatious, giant question mark. So many acronyms, so many course names, and so many jazzy program offerings are competing for your attention, but where do you even begin to draw the distinctions? That's where our parent guide to study abroad comes in. Although it may be an unofficial part of the study abroad process, especially for parents, to be overwhelmed at first,

these five steps can help you navigate the exciting study abroad world and choose a study abroad program for your child's abroad adventure:

## 1. Discuss Your Child's Goals.

Your child's semester abroad presents an exciting opportunity for them to enrich their college experience and gain invaluable skills and a global perspective as they launch into their adult lives. Studying abroad is a super popular thing to do, but take a minute (or thirty) to ask your child why exactly they want to embark on their journey.

Is it because they want to immerse in the local culture? Program providers, such as SIT Study Abroad, specialize in theme-centric programs that challenge students to tackle complex global issues through project-based and experiential learning models.

Is it because they want to gain career experience? Other providers, such as PINC International, organize programs that include internship placements, professional development, and cultural activities.

Is it because they want to master a foreign language? Maximo Nivel is just one of many companies that offer language intensive courses abroad.

While there are hundreds of programs out there to fit your child's needs, the most important thing to consider is how they envision studying abroad in their personal story. With this first step, you and your child will align on the same page as you continue your search for the perfect study abroad

## 2. Look at a Map.

Another outcome of discussing your child's goals is to narrow down a part of the world, country, and eventually, a city where they will gain the experience they desire. With respect to destination, considering a country's language might be a clear answer of where to study and what type of program will allow them to master their language skills.

Meanwhile, if your child is not a linguaphile or they're concerned about living in a non-English-speaking country, their best bets might be to check out study abroad programs in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, or Ireland.

While making sure your child's study abroad destination will satisfy their language preferences and requirements is of utmost importance, the "abroad" portion of "study abroad" is just as crucial for parents to consider.



A great place to start is the U.S. State Department Study Abroad website, which provides safety information about destinations around the world. Beyond language, other aspects of a country's culture have the potential to heavily impact the experience your child has abroad, such as the traditional cuisine for students with dietary restrictions or inclusion for students who identify as LGBTQ.

## 3. Go to the Listings & Read Reviews!

Now that your child has identified their motivations and goals and chosen their destination for study abroad, it's time to weed through the thousands of possible program options. Several websites, including yours truly, GoAbroad.com, will help narrow your search using handy filter tools for location, term, and subject.

But, what do all these program names/acronyms mean anyway? Although your child has the option to directly-enroll at an international university, third party providers (the acronyms!) are independent companies that coordinate programs abroad for students too. Yet, not all acronym-named providers are created equal.

When looking at study abroad programs offered by various companies, designate some time to investigate the companies themselves. Be sure to click to the program and company websites in order to get a better picture of your child's experience in a larger context.

Beyond the specifics of your child's desired program, parents should consider the overall company's size, history, and the larger alumni community that your child will eventually join.

On the company and program listing pages on GoAbroad's Study Abroad Directory, you can read through alumni reviews that will provide direct insight into the experience your child will have and can be a great resource for candid information about the program. Most of all, continue referring back to your child's study abroad goals to check whether a potential program will satisfy their personal requirements before you choose the best study abroad program for them.

## 4. Analyze the Options.

After selecting a few good program providers (and saving them in MyGoAbroad of course!), you and your child can begin to look at the different study abroad program options to determine if the offerings fit your child's wishes, and your budget. It's a good idea to start by looking at what is included in the price of the program to find the most affordable options; for example, how many courses and where, housing options, visa assistance, flights costs, cell phones etc. Next, you can look at the fun stuff, such as excursions, volunteer opportunities, special events, etc.

Every study abroad program is likely to be different; while this is part of what is overwhelming, it is also what will make your child's experience unique and provide them with the platform to start their independent explorations.

There are several questions that you and your child can consider to help evaluate which program options are of most importance to them and to you. While they may be adamant about living in a homestay, you might be more concerned about what kind of in-country support they will receive. Discuss your answers together to clarify your priorities when narrowing down the study abroad programs in their dream destination.

## 5. Create a Game Plan.

Finally, you've picked a study abroad program and now it's time to make it happen! There are a few logistical things for parents to consider in order to confirm that the program of your child's dreams can actually become a reality. First, most study abroad programs require an application, and sometimes recommendations or transcripts. It's best for parents to research programs way ahead of time in order to make sure you can provide all required materials by the deadline in question. Next, your child will need to get in touch with their university's study abroad office to confirm whether they will be able to receive academic credit for their courses abroad and the process to make sure these credits transfer.

If you and your child determine that additional funding will be necessary to afford their program abroad, there are plenty of scholarship options available. As your child applies for financial support, you can begin to formulate an agreeable budget for them to adhere to throughout their time abroad.

Not only will the final study abroad program you choose be a perfect fit for your child's personal interests, but also it will be a financially and academically smart move for your child's continued success.

With all the research involved in choosing a program, you may be doubting if the effort it takes for your child to study abroad is worth it. Are you thinking, is it really worth all this work? The answer is YES! Your child knows it, and they will appreciate that you get on board with their journey and award their ambition by joining in the search. While you may have to (sadly) say goodbye on departure day, the effort you put in alongside your child will allow you to send them off confident that you have selected a study abroad program that is beneficial for the whole family.



# TRAVEL SAFETY TIPS YOU HAVEN'T HEARD ABOUT YOUR CHILD GOING ABROAD (BUT NEED TO)

By: Mariel Tavakoli

Didn't your child know that going abroad would mean hours of worry and wondering for their dear parents? Why couldn't they have just stayed safe and sound at home or on campus? These are the questions that may be buzzing through your head as you outwardly shower your son or daughter in support of their decision to venture overseas. There's no need for you to lose your cool by harassing your child for their whereabouts, forcing them

into hours of self-defense classes, or buying them dozens of keychain pepper sprays (no judgment if you want to suggest these in moderation!).

Instead, arm your child with the following basic travel safety tips from GoAbroad and some of the industry's most experienced travelers that they can follow as they embark on their adventure abroad:

## 1. Research the country before you go – [Global Goose](#)

Being safe and prepared for international travel starts at home. Sit down with your child and research their host country, including dangerous neighborhoods, basic phrases of the local language, etiquette, and common customs. The more research done ahead of time, the more effortless your child's safety regimen will be; also, meaning more mental space for their meaningful overseas experience!

Encourage them to save photos of maps on their phones or print them out to keep in their bags or wallets. These can go right next to other useful information to keep on-hand at all times, like emergency contacts, passport copies, and useful addresses. Doing stellar preparation is the best way to prevent your child from getting stuck in dubious situations.

## 2. Enroll in STEP – [PINC International](#)

For CEO and Founder of PINC International Lisette Miranda, international travel safety for all participants begins with signing up for the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Both you and your child can register in order to receive travel alerts and warnings throughout their time abroad, even available with the STEP app. Most importantly, registering your child will notify the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate of their status abroad, in case of any emergency.

## 3. A safe traveler is a healthy traveler – [GoAbroad](#)

You and your child may be stressing about all the things to get done before they leave, but don't discount the importance of them departing in tip-top-shape. While traveling abroad, your child will need to navigate dozens of potential health risks with new water, food, climate, insects, and the occasional temptation to pet (or nose-kiss) the oh-so-cute animals that may cross their paths. Beyond stocking them with emergency supplies, make sure to check the need for any vaccinations.

## 4. Keep your valuables on you while in transit – [Adventurous Kate](#)

Every safe traveler needs that special, pickpocket proof, usually cross-body bag or backpack that will become essentially feel like an extension of their body during their time abroad. When traveling to each destination or from place-to-place, it is of utmost importance that your child keep their valuables bag (and all other luggage) with them at all times. Even if this means sleeping with bags tied to them in a train station or sitting at a restaurant with their bag on their lap, it's always safest for your child to stay on guard and in alert possession of their belongings.

## 5. Put away electronics on the street – [Nomadic Matt](#)

Walking down the street with podcasts or a personal soundtrack blaring, while skimming articles or snapping a personal selfie, are all too popular in today's society. When traveling though, encourage your child to put their earbuds and electronics away. These activities are easy signals to pickpockets and other petty criminals that your child is distracted and sparks attention to the location of your child's beloved (and likely expensive) electronic device. If your child is accustomed to their headphones in or multitasking by reading articles while walking, have them start practicing this new walking style while already home. Who knows, they may just find enjoyment in this new awareness of their surroundings.

## 6. Smile and say hello – [The Expert Vagabond](#)

After years of preaching, "Don't talk to strangers," this tip may seem a little counterintuitive. However, with those few words in a foreign language and a friendly face, your child can gain the trust of new friends and neighbors to create their personal community overseas.

In addition, receiving an angry response to a smile will alert your child to strangers who might be less trustworthy. Overall, your child should feel comfortable communicating, asking for help, or even confirming "Is this safe?" while overseas, which can start with them smiling and just saying hello. surroundings...

### **7. Don't look (or act) like a target – Alyssa Ramos via Huffington Post**

Although it is close to impossible to blend into a different culture entirely, there are some clear ways your child can practice being a chameleon. When packing, use your research to help your child narrow their suitcase contents to clothes that will fit in with local customs or fashion trends and limited valuable jewelry. Also, it's a good idea to investigate both typical behaviors in your child's destination, as well as how your home country is perceived.

For example, Americans abroad stereotypically stand out for being loud, brash, and drunk when out at night. While your child should not be afraid of having fun or expressing themselves while abroad, traveling safely calls for them to act and appear within the boundaries of the local culture.

### **8. Walk with bold confidence, like you know the place – Grrrl Traveler**

So much of traveling safely is in acting the part and believing in oneself. Coach your child on walking with their chin up, ears perked, shoulders back, and stride strong, even before they leave home. Whether on the street or on public transportation, during the day or night, it will be important for your child to stay calm, cool, and collected in all situations, including getting lost. If unsure of directions, your child can practice smiling and saying hello before asking for directions, or duck into a shop to pull out their saved photo or tucked away map to consult. Most importantly though, they must maintain that confident persona and convey that attitude of belonging to prevent being a target.



### **9. Trust your instincts – EVERYONE!**

You've spent so many years raising your child and cultivating their judgment, now trust them to apply all of those lessons while traveling overseas. Among the entire travel community, the number one travel safety tip is for a traveler to follow their instincts. The best judge of a situation will always be your gut. As your child prepares, strengthen their self-confidence to evaluate a situation, a person, or a place and act according to that instinct. More often than not, it will be right and keep them safe.

As a parent, you can become an active part of your child's travel safety abroad by starting the conversation pre-departure. While many travel tips out there focus on girls and women, all travelers should adhere to these basic travel safety tips when adventuring away from home. As a result, you will feel more confident that your child is traveling safely, and they will feel more secure and comfortable to explore while traveling abroad.

"Traveling tends to magnify all human emotions"- Peter Hoeg

"Letting your kids grow up is kind of like releasing a kite into the sky. You hate to see it go, but it looks so beautiful and free as it climbs higher and higher in the bright blue sky"

-Susan Gale



"Traveling expands the mind rarely"  
-Hans Christian Anderson

"Sometime love means letting go when you want to hold on tighter." -Unknown



# YOUR CHILD IS OVERSEAS NOW WHAT?

By: Mariel Tavakoli

After all the research, the preparation, the packing, the tearful goodbye (mostly on your end), your child has finally arrived in their destination abroad and you may wonder...now what? It might be tempting to hang around the phone, send messages over every form of communication, constantly check the news in whatever country, and spend each waking moment worrying about the whereabouts of your son or daughter. However, this is unnecessary.

Yes, your child is overseas, which means that they are embarking on a unique experience that will challenge and shape them. Whether studying, volunteering, teaching, or just plain adventuring, your child is rushing headlong into a learning experience that they'll continue to unpack in the years to come.

Here are several ways that parents can join their kids on the journey, without stifling the opportunity for growth that international travel can provide:

## 1. Choose a Means of Communication

Skype, email, Facebook, international phone plans, Twitter, blogs, Whatsapp, Viber...the list of apps and other forms of keeping in touch across international borders goes on and on. While your child may be familiar with some or all of these platforms, that does not mean that they need to be contacted on all of them. Before you and your child part, decide on one or two of these systems that you will use together and prioritize to check for new messages. If your child does not respond

to your outreach on the chosen platform, you can then rest assured that it is likely they did not have access or WIFI, rather than feel the need to send multiple messages in every manner possible.

## 2. Agree on a Time to Talk

Another way to prevent agitation over communication is to set a time that you and your child will talk. Maybe it's every morning, every Tuesday, or every other week. Choosing a time together will allow you and your child to set expectations of when and how often you will be in touch. As your child will be soaking up every opportunity abroad, it will not help either of you to be constantly hanging around a phone or computer.

Be advised that it is best to decide on this schedule after your child arrives and is settled with their program, as class schedules and travel plans are subject to change. Remember to be considerate of the time change and availability of WiFi or phone service, which may be different between where they are overseas and your home. While your schedule is a best practice, both parent and student must be flexible.

At the end of the day, communication is key, even if that means communicating about communicating!

## 3. If Possible, Keep in Touch with their Program Organizer

Nowadays, many programs abroad are actively involved with documenting participants when in-program and involving parents with what is going on with their children abroad. Parents can now stay in touch with a child's in-country activity via email newsletters, Facebook pages, Twitter, or even instant photo and video updates on Snapchat. When selecting a program, be sure to check out their current social media platforms to get a feel for how to stay updated once your child is abroad.

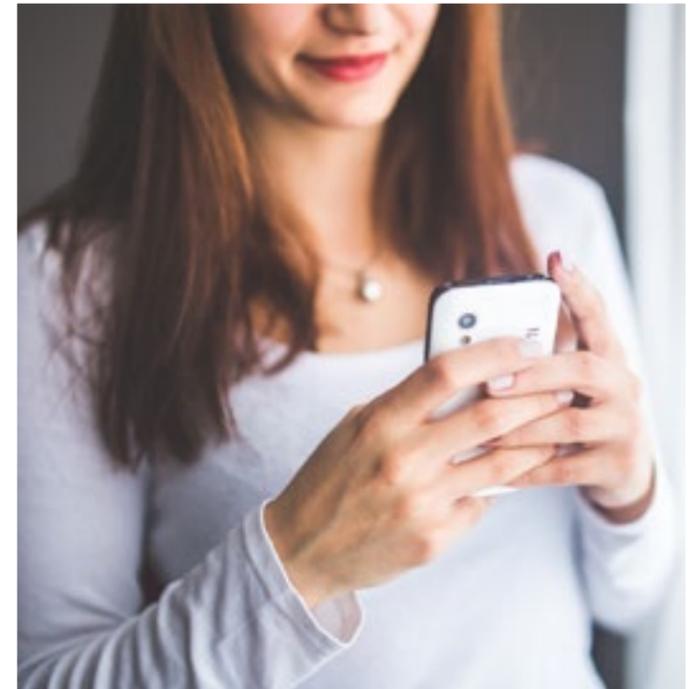
Lisette Miranda, CEO of PINC International, started a program on Snapchat to give both parents and prospective program participants an up-close look at day-to-day life with a PINC program. According to Miranda,

**"It's our primary job as program providers to ensure parents that their children are safe and this investment is worthwhile. Once parents are on board though, we've noticed how supportive and encouraging they are of their children to make the most of their time abroad."**

## 4. Discuss Budgeting

It may be hard to connect with the experience your child is having across time and space, however one topic where a parent can provide practical guidance is regarding maintaining a healthy budget. With millions of new opportunities to travel in a new country and region, young adults may lose perspective of financial smarts, especially when navigating foreign currencies.

In addition to setting strict limits on spending, parents can provide helpful reminders to spend wisely and choose economical experiences that balance cost and fun.



Decide on a budget before your child goes overseas and then follow-up to check on this agreement as your child continues with their program. Have a prior plan in place for if (\*cough\* - when) your child asks for a bit more cash to cover their end-of-semester expenses. What are expectations? Will it need to be repaid? Will it come out of their normal allowance? Establishing clarity of consequences (good and bad) will also motivate your child to stay on top of their travel funds.

## 5. Be Supportive

Living, studying, and working overseas presents an enormous challenge that both you and your child will be confronting in different ways throughout the duration of their time abroad. While every moment provides an opportunity for adventure, learning and wonder, your child may also experience culture shock, homesickness, or loneliness in new forms,

as they navigate an entirely new environment. It may be hard to bear the separation during these spells, when distance makes rushing in to “fix” the problem impossible. Do your best to balance emotional support and creative problem solving without providing solutions or suggesting they hop on the next plane home.

## 6. Listen

There are many ways to be supportive, however one key way that your child will be sure to appreciate is if their parents listen. Living abroad is an amazing opportunity that in some way, big or small, will have a lasting effect on your child. As they process each experience, accompanied by people who they have not known for much time, they may turn to you to talk out what is happening, what they are seeing and what they are feeling. Try not to disregard their experience or cut them off after hearing the 100th story of what food they ate or another tale about a weekend trip to a new city. Instead, listen and give them the space to talk it out. Your child may be embarking on a new journey without you, but you can still join them.

## 7. Have a Drink!

Okay, so you don't technically need to imbibe if it's not your go-to relaxation technique. As a parent with a kid abroad, especially in places you've never been or know little about, it can be stressful. You can't spend the next few weeks (or months...or years!) squabbling in peril. So take a load off. Do some yoga, go for a run, delete all of the dumb shows your kid has recorded and replace them with your favorites. Try to find some “me” time amidst this stage of life, including healthy ways to deal with your stress or sadness at the situation. Empty nest syndrome is real, and is just as much a transition for you as is the transition your child is facing abroad.



# DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT: TRAVEL PROGRAM TESTIMONIALS



“My time spent in Peru, through the Maximo Nivel program, was an experience that I will never forget. I was able to fully immerse myself in the Peruvian culture through the itinerary they created for us, and was able to strengthen my Spanish speaking inside and outside of the Maximo classroom. The volunteer work we were able to do was the most life changing opportunity that I was lucky enough to have the chance to experience. I would highly recommend this program to any high schooler who wants to partake in a service trip, work on their Spanish skills, or just simply wants to experience another culture. Maximo Nivel is an amazing company that has changed my life for the better in so many ways.”

- Jenna, Peru, 2015  
Maximo Nivel

“Going on an intercultural exchange is a once in a lifetime opportunity, so you have to make sure you do it right. YFU is the best option. While I did have many exciting, educational, and emotional experiences abroad, my father had his doubts at first. After conducting thorough research, we concluded that YFU was the safest program around with their intricate layers of support for both the student and natural family. During my exchange, YFU ensured that I was safe, comfortable, and ready to learn. Great experiences can be had anywhere, but safe and educational experiences are YFU's specialty in my opinion. I encourage any parents of prospective students to research YFU's support system.”

- Ronak, Japan, 2016  
YFU



“There is no experience more transformative and expanding than study-abroad, and SPI seeks to offer the best in this type of experience. They carefully choose study programs at universities which can offer well-trained homestay experiences and excellent language studies. Students are encouraged to learn to live like a “local” and to truly enjoy all parts of living abroad.”

-Laura, Sienna,  
SPI Study Abroad



# WHAT YOUR CHILD WANTS YOU TO KNOW ABOUT REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

By: Mariel Tavakoli

As your child prepared to go abroad, you may have heard the phrase “culture shock,” a common concern of travelers as they immerse and adapt to a new lifestyle in a foreign culture. But what about when your child comes back home? This transition from a foreign to familiar culture is called “reverse culture shock” or “re-entry,” and it may surprisingly present more of a challenge.

Whether your child was abroad for a few weeks, a few months, or a few years, they will likely experience some form of reverse culture shock upon their return home. Regardless if it’s outwardly visible or not, your child will be attempting to reconcile the ways they have changed with the home they expected to have stayed the same.

They may not know quite how to articulate it yet, but here are some likely things your child wishes you knew about reverse culture shock:

## **Re-adjustment will take time.**

Although you may have been impatient to be reunited with your child, the process for them to reorient back to hometown life is just that, a process. At first, they may be excited for familiar foods, sights, friends, and family, and it will appear that their time abroad has been forgotten. Other times, returned travelers may exhibit extreme emotions of sadness or nostalgia.

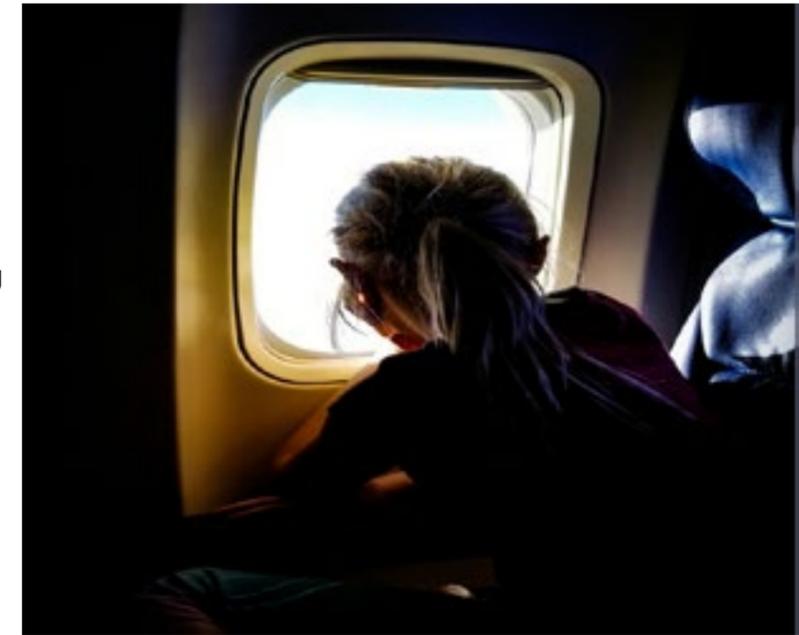
The U.S. State Department cites John and Jeanne Gullahorn’s phases of reverse culture shock that resemble a “W-curve,” with extreme highs and even more extreme lows being initial phases of the return. In whatever form, your child must arrive at a balance of recognizing that their abroad experience has happened and determining how it now fits into their life back at home. There is no list of generic steps or a program to follow. Rather, every child will need to navigate this path on their own.

## **They’re scared.**

Going overseas can be a gamechanger. Think of the learning curve of their freshmen year at college PLUS being a toddler and discovering how the world works. That’s a lot of new knowledge and self-reflection to handle. Your child may return home exhausted, but once that fades there is a lot they may fear, from the surface to the core. What will their friends at home think of the new person they’ve become? Will that person disappear now that they’re home? Will their past relationships change? Will their classes and major now seem useless? Was this experience even real? Returning home from such a life-changing experience overseas is scary, because it can be a wake-up call to the grand uncertainty of life. For perhaps the first time, your child has been awakened to a whole world of possibilities. How they handle this uncertainty will start with you. When your child arrives home, begin with setting an open tone for discussion. Their time abroad should not be a closed chapter of their life. Rather, talk with your child about how their overseas experience can be applied to their lives at home and in the future.

## **They view the world differently.**

Being abroad means exposure to new points of view from different countries, different cultures, different academic theories, and different parts of their home country. Whatever type of program or experience your child was a part of, they have intimately learned the ways of a new culture through classes, activities and just partaking in daily life. They likely also were involved in many candid conversations about the world that



may have questioned their values or turned their perspective upside down.

As a result, according to Forbes, “Looking outward makes [them] realize that there is a world outside [the USA] which has a lot to offer in the ways of opportunities and culture.” Listen as they express their newly developed views and opinions. Yes, they are still your child, but they have gained a unique insight as a #globalcitizen that is valuable as they continue their lives at home or abroad.

## **They view themselves differently.**

Your child will be dealing with a lot of emotions upon their return and a lot of this will have to do with a change in how they see themselves. As they return, your child will not only be navigating the transition of moving between locations and cultures, they are also likely to be managing to reconcile two senses of identity. At home, the relationship between you and your child has defined them over the course of their entire lives. Overseas, your child had an opportunity for growth that is entirely independent and defined by their personal experience in their foreign destination.

With reverse culture shock, your child will be recognizing how they may have changed while abroad and how to integrate those newly realized aspects of their identity into their lives back at home. These changes may be visible to you, or they may be subtle.

**They may not want things to go back to “normal.”**

Reverse culture shock is inevitable and ultimately a natural byproduct of the life that your child built abroad. While it may have existed miles away, in a different environment and possibly in a different language, that life is just as real to your child as the one you have continued to lead in their absence at home. Whether it comes to who they are, their interests or their routines, or a desire to break old habits and cultivate new ones, your child will be looking ways to connect the “normal” they remember to their “new normal.”

Coming home may be comforting, but that does not guarantee that they want things to go back to the way they were pre-departure. Create space for your child to try out different aspects of their international experience at home. Give them the floor to confidently share a lesson learned in class or the kitchen to cook their favorite recipe from overseas. While your child may insist on eating with only chopsticks for a few days, they will slowly settle into a normal that blends both the old and new.

Try to remember that your child is not trying to be pretentious. They’re not trying to belittle your normal. They’re not trying to rub their adventures overseas in anyone’s face. What you see as unpleasant behavior may be their way of keeping the memories and language skills they developed while abroad alive. While you may be excited to tell them about all the things they missed while away, remember that the same timeframe of months and holidays corresponds to their life in their overseas destination.

The experiences they will want to share with you are evidence of their transformation from a tourist to a traveler and from a child to an adult. Be proud that your child was learning while overseas, whether in class, with a language or in their cultural observations, but teach them to be tactful (if necessary) when it comes to this interesting

**They don’t mean to be jerks.**

Watching your child struggle to eat french fries with chopsticks may prompt you to roll your eyes. You may get frustrated when they constantly slip in words in a different language or “forget” an English word. That or the 100th story that begins with, “When I was in Barcelona…” or when they are quick to speak disparagingly about their (your shared) hometown, home country, or home culture.



**They need your help.**

Any returning traveler has nightmares in dread of the following question: “Wow you were overseas, so how was it?” While this question is scary personally, it is even scarier when in a professional or formal setting.

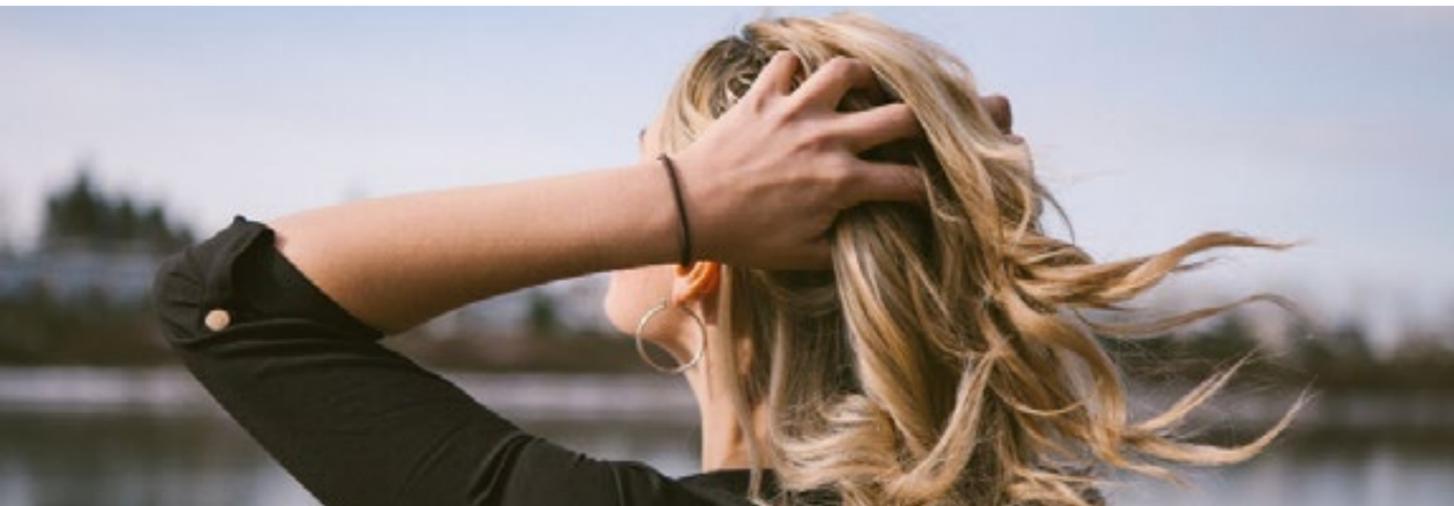
An experience overseas can translate into a lot of skills that will stand out on your child’s resume or in an interview. However, according to Lisette Miranda, CEO of PINC International, which provides immersion and professional development programs for young women abroad.

**“It takes time and practice to articulate the newly developed hard and soft skills learned. Our programs dedicate time at the end to work on how to talk to future employers, professors, family and friends in a way that highlights and showcases how their time abroad has made them a more well-rounded individual.”**

As a parent, don’t throw your child to the wolves by putting them on the spot about their time overseas. Instead, work with them when they return to continue to reflect and parse out an “elevator speech” over time that encapsulates their overseas experience in a short blurb.

From the moment your child steps off their plane and into your arms, you will become an intimate part of your child’s experience with reverse culture shock. As their parent, the best thing you can do is be aware and communicate with your child about their unique reactions to re-entry. Sometimes they will want to shower you with stories and pictures, but other times, they may prefer to be alone or to call on a friend from overseas.

No matter your child’s behavior, they will appreciate your respect and that you value their time overseas as a new component of the person they will grow to become as a result of this experience.





# 10 PIECES OF ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF TRAVEL-BOUND TEENS

By: Charleen Johnson Stover

No matter who you are—or your age—traveling abroad can seem like an exhilarating, overwhelming, and nerve-racking idea. What may be even more nerve racking is the thought of your child going abroad. As a parent, you no doubt want your kid to have a successful, enriching, rewarding time on their high school travel programs. So what role can you (and should you) play in creating a space for your teen to do just that?

For you, having a successful time abroad may mean identifying the 17 types of coral on a scuba diving trip in Belize. For your kid, success abroad may be as simple yet daunting as finding a group of friends to play basketball with while studying abroad in Australia. Maybe your child is packing their bags for a multi-country high school volunteering trip, or they are shopping for internships. Either way, it's important to keep one thing in mind:

Your kid will still be the same person when they come back, but their perspective of the world—and themselves—will have fundamentally changed after high school travel programs abroad.

## 1. Preserve your memories.

Find an activity that you and your child both enjoy doing together. Play cards, or watch a movie about travel to get inspired. Even preparing your kid to learn a new language will help you enjoy the last moments you have together, instead of worrying about your kid's time abroad. Take pictures of you and your kid having a blast, so that the both of you can hang them up on your walls after the big departure date.

When kids feel overwhelmed with the newness of being abroad, few things will be as comforting as having photos of family and friends on their wall to make them realize that there are people who love them, no matter how far away.

## 2. Research your kid's destination.

Being as informed as possible of your child's host country and city will prepare the both of you. Maybe your kid will have wifi at home, or maybe they will have to bike three miles to get to an internet café. Maybe it's cheaper than you thought to send each other postcards and packages. Knowing these things will help you know what to expect in terms of communicating with each other.

In terms of your child's experience, research their host country's norms: What do they eat? Will there be conflicts with your kid's food allergies while abroad? How do people dress? Do women wear shorts in the street, or do they wear head scarves? What is considered "professional dress?" In Nicaragua, jeans are fine to wear to work, but not in Chile, where khakis will do. Knowing what to wear will help your child present him or herself in the safest, most professional way.

## 3. Help your kid form travel goals.

The earlier your student learns to travel meaningfully, the easier it will become. Have them think about why they are going abroad. Yes, they will be traveling, but why would they travel to a different country rather than staying in their own? You want your kid to think about how they can make informed, conscious decisions while abroad. Encourage your child to consider the communities they will visit, and how their presence will impact them (for better or worse). Plant these seeds early on so your kid adopts a 360 degree view of their travel decisions, and how they can affect the lives of others.

## 4. Strike up a conversation.

Not sure how your kid feels about what kinds of choices they will make abroad? Ask them! You'd be surprised at the conversations that would come up if you asked them questions such as:

- **Are you nervous about going abroad? Why?**
- **What are you looking forward to doing?**
- **What do you know about the country you're going to?**

If you have gone abroad before, this is a great chance for you to think about what you were nervous about. When it comes to traveling abroad, the first time is always the hardest because you don't know what to expect. Your kid may not have elaborate answers to these questions yet, and that is fine. The point is for them to think critically about their journey.

Sometimes it helps to encourage kids to be overly dramatic...this gets the juices flowing, and light conversation is typically a good segue to more serious discussions.

- **What's the worst possible thing you can imagine happening?**
- **What are your greatest fears about going abroad? Sharks?**
- **Let's brainstorm the most embarrassing thing you are probably going to do while there...**

## 5. Help them choose a program.

And you thought choosing a destination was hard enough! Even after your kid has zeroed in on a new place to call a temporary "home," there are many program options within each country to choose from. Students can opt to sign up for programs that focus on community service and volunteering, language learning, or adventure. Organizations such as the Youth for Understanding, Maximo Nivel, and ISA all offer programs with varied themes and varied levels of immersion. It is up to you, as a team, to choose a program that fits your personal goals and checks off all the list of a dream program.

Be sure to read reviews of programs, talk to past participants, and ask other parents for insight they'd be willing to share. Check the organizations out on social media for "social proof" to see photos of current and past students and get a general vibe for the organization as a whole. Choose a program that is committed to working alongside the local community and integrating them whenever possible.

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