



API Guide

for Parents & Guardians



Experience the world with API

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Greetings from Academic Programs International (API)!

We are pleased that your future traveler has applied and been accepted to an API program! The experience of living, interacting and learning in an international environment presents invaluable opportunities for each student's academic and personal development. All of our academic and extracurricular offerings are selected with the goal of helping students to grow more self-aware and culturally sensitive. We envision each student evolving from a tourist to a resident to a global citizen, and API is dedicated to supporting this lifelong process.

We have already corresponded with your student by phone, email and mail regarding acceptance procedures and the next steps in the preparation process. We realize that many of you are involved financially or otherwise in this experience abroad, and we want to include you in the process! We hope this handbook will provide you with guidance about the program your student has chosen and will answer some of the logistical questions you may have.

At API, we strongly believe that extensive pre-departure preparation is an essential element of ensuring a positive experience. Traveling internationally is becoming more and more common. You and your student may be seasoned travelers, but living in a foreign country, whether it is for four weeks or an academic year, requires a different level of preparation. The materials and support we provide throughout the pre-departure process will assist you with your preparations.

Throughout the preparation period, we will direct much of our correspondence only to students, as we seek to empower them to prepare for their session. Your student will receive a great deal of information over the coming weeks, and reviewing those materials independently is an important part of the preparation process.

We look forward to working with you and your student during this process, and we invite you to contact our office at any time with your questions and concerns. The resources we provide and your interactions with our staff will assure you that your student has made the right decision to go abroad and to do so with API!

Sincerely,
API Staff

Getting To Know API: Our History and Educational Philosophy

Since its founding in 1997, API has been committed to providing the best comprehensive experience abroad possible with personal attention available to our students throughout their programs, and to working closely with home universities to offer support before, during and after the experience. To read more about our history and mission, find the "Why API" link on our website (www.apiabroad.com).

API was founded by four women who were highly committed to facilitating education abroad and to providing high-quality, affordable study abroad programs for students across the United States. All four founders had successful international experiences, first as students and later as professionals. Additionally, their personal experiences as mothers have shaped API in a unique way, as they sought to develop programs that would challenge students and still provide them with the necessary support to optimize their learning. Our programs strive to maximize students' potential for linguistic and cultural growth through carefully designed orientation programs, cultural and social outings, and excursions. We have established API programs with the sincere belief that optimizing the outcomes of language and culture studies in a local environment requires commitment and integrity from both the domestic and overseas staff of an organization.

The company has grown steadily, reflecting the strength of API's staff and our relationships with partner universities. To this end, we strive to establish and maintain strong relationships with every university we serve and to provide individual attention to every participant. Our students hail from institutions across the United States.

What Makes Us Distinctive?

API aims to provide students with quality *learning* experiences abroad. We recognize the many educational opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, and we endeavor to take advantage of these opportunities by making them available to our students. We offer support services for our students before, during, and after their programs so that they can make the most of their experience. We have invested a great deal of time in developing resources for students' language and cultural learning. We strive to provide positive and comprehensive experiences to students of all backgrounds and resources, in a supportive academic environment.

Pre-departure Services:

- Advising regarding logistics and academics on-site; coordination with U.S. home universities when necessary to facilitate transfer credit and financial aid transference
- Orientation materials and sessions, including language preparatory materials (for Spain and France programs)
- Scholarships

On-site Resources and Services:

- Full-time class registration and tuition at the host institution for all semester options
- In-country directors and staff to provide support as well as emergency assistance
- On-site orientation, including safety, transportation, housing and academic orientations
- Advising and support during the registration process and throughout the academic term
- Excursions
- Quality housing
- Extensive insurance benefits, including emergency evacuation and repatriation, medical and life insurance
- API-coordinated social and cultural activities on-site

Reentry Resources and Services:

- Re-entry materials and support
- Post-program evaluation
- Official transcript issued to home institution for credit transference
- Alumni network and professional development opportunities

Parent and Guardian Expectations

While fully recognizing that the majority of our travelers are adults, we view parents/guardians as partners and collaborators in the preparation and journeys of our participants. We welcome your involvement throughout the abroad experience and would like to share our ideas about how you can help your student to maximize his or her experience abroad. Know that your support and ongoing communication with your student both before and during the program can be an instrumental part of his or her success.

We, the founders of API, as former study abroad students ourselves, are intimately aware of the personal and professional growth that result from international experiences. Yet as mothers who have sent our own children abroad, we can fully relate to the anxiety and nerves that affect many parents/guardians in the pre-departure phase and well into the abroad experience itself. Putting your child on a plane to a distant -- and often unknown-- location is heart wrenching, even when you know it is to his or her benefit!

We have created this list of what you can expect from API, as well as our expectations regarding how you will assist your students.

Assurances from API:

- API's stateside staff and Resident Directors abroad are committed to delivering high quality student services and programs. All API university programs have on-site coordinators and directors to provide ongoing assistance and guidance to students in our host destinations.
- API offers academic and cultural opportunities for your student, seeking to push them outside of their comfort zones. Cultural events and excursions have been selected with the goal of providing students with a broader vision of their host country or region.
- API will place your students in accommodations that have been thoroughly investigated on the basis of quality, safety and convenience. Safety can never be guaranteed, but API believes that ongoing reviews of our housing and careful selection can help to mitigate risk.
- API will send detailed information and communications to your student throughout the experience abroad: before, during and post-program. We will also communicate with you or your student's home institution whenever warranted.
- API will monitor potential social and political unrest abroad and provide your student with instructions regarding how to respond safely. We will also notify your student's home institution of the situation, sharing how API is monitoring and handling matters on the ground.
- API has established extensive policies to promote safety and security. For details, see <https://apiabroad.com/health-safety/>
- Students have direct 24/7 access to our in-country directors for ongoing support or emergency needs.
- API stateside staff members can be reached at the API office during business hours at 800-844-4124 or 512-600-8900. In case of an emergency outside of business hours, an API staff member will be reachable by calling those numbers above and following the prompts for our emergency messaging service.
- API will seek to empower your student to handle most situations independently, but may choose to involve parents/guardians during emergencies. Parents can expect support and timely responses whenever they seek out API expertise in emergency situations.

Expectations for Parent/Guardian Involvement and Collaboration:

Parents/Guardians will:

- Discuss their student's goals and expectations for this program pre-departure and at a variety of points during the session abroad to monitor progress.
- Seek to understand how the program works and how it will impact the student's academics upon their return to the home university campus.
- Review this handbook as well as the API website (www.apiabroad.com), our blog (www.blog.apiabroad.com), and other social media outlets to more fully understand all that is involved with the experience abroad.
- Assist their student with financing and budgeting concerns. Doing so can mean diving into the complicated world of financial aid!
- Engage their student in a thorough discussion of safety and behavioral issues, as well as the API Code of Conduct. In particular, parents should speak frankly about the use of illegal drugs and alcohol while abroad, as that is the number one factor in on-site emergencies and personal crises abroad.

- Establish a communication plan with their student as to when and how often to be in contact while abroad. It is particularly important to discuss the importance of a first call home upon arrival!
- Research cell phone and connectivity options with your student and choose a plan that allows affordable and consistent communication. We recommend that students have the ability to make calls on a network, not solely on wifi, due to potential emergency needs. Students will be asked to provide in-country contact information to their respective API Resident Directors in case of an emergency.
- Respond quickly to any requests from the API office.
- Encourage their student to bring up issues and concerns directly to API Resident Directors on-site (e.g., roommate concerns, academic issues, cultural adjustment problems, etc.). Strive to balance the concerns of the student with the advice and expertise shared by API Resident Directors and U.S. staff.
- Understand how FERPA laws (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>) affect what universities and API can and cannot share with parents and guardians (i.e., certain legal protections regarding the release of personal information for adult participants affect what API is able to share).
- Give their student both "roots and wings." Encourage their student to take the lead in the planning and execution of this time abroad, but provide support when they face inevitable challenges adjusting to a new environment.
- Coordinate with their student if planning to visit the host country so as to not conflict with travel dates for excursions and special events included in the API program.
- Discuss any travel plans and activities not included in the API program. Ensure that their student provides contact information for fellow travelers, as well as lodging information.

**We thank our colleagues at NAFSA, Arcadia and CISAbroad for their work outlining expectations for parents and guardians, and for inspiring API to articulate the information and recommendations above.*

Understanding the Process

Beginning Procedures

Most students will begin the process by searching for a program on the API website or by creating an account. Once students find the program they wish to apply to, they click the button that says. "Personalize and Apply" and they will be guided through the process of choosing the number of credits they wish to receive, selecting their housing for the program, and opting into excursions. Once they are finished personalizing, they will complete a few additional questions that are part of the application before they complete the process and submit. Our staff works quickly to accept students to a program within five to seven days after the students have submitted all required application components.

API assigns each student to a Program Advisor who personally attends to his or her application and post-acceptance processes. API also has a Financial Services team that is dedicated to helping families work through the financial details of the program. We invite you to email that team at support-other@apiexperience.com.

Financing the Experience

Note: Some universities have a direct bill arrangement with API. This signifies that the home university will pay some or all of the program fees to API on the student's behalf, and the student would make payments to the university according to their typical payment schedule. The billing statements you receive from API will reflect this arrangement.

Program Payments and Fees

Students submit a non-refundable \$50 application fee when they apply to an API program, followed by a \$400 non-refundable confirmation payment. The confirmation deposit counts toward the published program cost and allows API to secure housing placement and enrollment in the host institution.

Any additional/optional fees (i.e. single room, additional course, etc.) are due as indicated on your student's billing information. Billing details reside in the student's APICoconnect account, which is created during the application process.

Students have the option to make payments with a credit card or bank draft/ACH transaction through their APICoconnect accounts. API also accepts checks, money orders, direct billpay and wire transfers.

Using Financial Aid

API is happy to accept financial aid offered through and processed by your student's home university or private parties (e.g. student loans or scholarships). We recommend you check with your student's U.S. university financial aid and study abroad offices for further details on which types of aid can transfer to an abroad program. All students using financial aid to pay for an API program will be required to have their home institution's Financial Aid Office submit a formal document known as the Financial Aid Verification Form to API to certify the amount of the financial aid award. Once we receive documentation of the aid from the home university, we will defer the payment deadlines according to the disbursement date(s) of the funds. Families should be aware that the funds may be deposited into the student's account and not sent directly to API.

Read more about API's financial policies, including Scholarship Opportunities and Cancellation Policies here: <https://apiabroad.com/other-resources/financial-information/>

Academics/Internship Placements

API strives to prioritize academics in all aspects of our programming. This begins with our approach to empower participants to manage the enrollment and pre-departure process independently. We offer our participants many opportunities to enhance their engagement throughout the process. Even weekend excursions and cultural activities offered during the session serve to introduce participants to various aspects of their host city, country and region.

Course/Internship Offerings

Students should work with their home university advisor in order to design a program that best suits their academic degree requirements. Students need to obtain approval from their home university for their session abroad, if they intend to receive credit and/or financial aid for the session. We recommend that students check with their study abroad, admissions, and/or registrar's offices, as well as relevant academic departments/advisors regarding what paperwork needs to be completed before the student travels abroad. Students are responsible for arranging for the transfer of credits with their home universities; API will provide course or internship syllabi as available prior to the program start date. In some cases, students may not complete final course registration until after they arrive on-site, so we encourage students to have first and second choice classes pre-approved so they will have flexibility in the event of cancellations or schedule conflicts.

Transcripts

Transcripts from host institutions abroad are typically issued two to four months (eight to twelve weeks) after the end of the program, as long as the student has paid the API balance in full and has no outstanding fees. API encourages students who are athletes, scholarship recipients or seniors to speak with their home university to plan for this transcript timeline. Depending on the program, your student will receive either a transcript from an accredited foreign university or a U.S. university that acts as a "school of record" for the foreign university. An official transcript will be mailed to the campus address specified by your student on the Transcript Release form. A copy of the official transcript and grades will be sent to students at their permanent address. To request an additional transcript, your student can visit the Alumni section of the API website. Transcripts can only be requested in writing by the student. Grades and other course information cannot be released to anyone other than the student.

Resources and Materials

The acceptance email

While you have received this parent email, your student has also been sent an API acceptance notification by email. Much of the documentation can be sent via email now, though we will mail certain items when the hard copy is required.

APIConnect

Students will have access to an online account where they can find the forms they need to complete as well as financial information. This includes a payment portal as well.

Orientation materials

Once they confirm their participation in the program and periodically throughout the pre-departure phase, students will begin receiving orientation materials via email. These materials provide detailed information on what to pack, what to expect upon arrival, safety and security tips, and much more valuable information. We offer diagnostic language tests and self-study activities to students going to French and Spanish-speaking locations.

The final e-packet

This final email of information is sent two to four weeks prior to the program start date and includes the materials below. Students must have satisfied all paperwork and financial requirements before we will send this information.

- Arrival details
- Contact information for on-site staff
- Housing assignment
- Orientation and Program Itinerary

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



Pre-Departure Checklist

For parents/guardians

- Apply for or renew your passport in the event that you want or need to visit your student during his/her session.
- Make photocopies of your student's passport and credit cards and identify a safe place to keep them.
- Based on the advice in this handbook, consider how you and your student will handle finances while abroad and make preparations accordingly. This may include establishing power of attorney for your child's financial affairs.
- Have a discussion with your student about goals for the experience, responsible behavior and safety.
- Make plans for cell phone usage and keeping in touch.

NOTE: API DOES NOT RECOMMEND CANCELING U.S. BASED INSURANCE PLANS IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF AN EARLY RETURN HOME. U.S. HEALTH INSURANCE SHOULD REMAIN ACTIVE DURING THE STUDENT'S TIME ABROAD.

Reminders provided to participants

- Apply for a passport. Make several copies of the photo page and upload one copy to the APIConnect account.
- If the program requires a student visa, review and follow the instructions provided by API in the online account.
- Check APIConnect to ensure that you have submitted all required paperwork and payments.
- Notify your home university that you will be abroad and complete any required registration, financial aid or course approval paperwork.
- Attend a pre-departure orientation session at your school.
- Review all orientation materials and complete the diagnostic pre-test (if applicable).
- One to two weeks before you depart, notify your bank and credit card company that you will be traveling outside of the U.S.
- Consider having your mail forwarded to your home address, and ensure that API has your permanent address listed as your billing address.
- Visit your medical provider to check on vaccinations, medication needs while abroad, etc.

Immigration Requirements

All travel to a foreign country requires a valid passport, and citizens of countries other than the U.S. may require additional documentation for foreign travel. Students should make several photocopies of their passport and CDC vaccination card (if applicable) to keep separate from the original (color is best, but black/white will work too). While in the host city, students do not need to carry the passport with them, but it is a good idea to have a copy at all times. Students should keep the original passport somewhere very safe in their accommodations. Parents/guardians should also keep a copy of the passport at home. It can take up to six weeks to receive a passport, so students should allow plenty of time for the application process, particularly if a visa is also required. In many cases, students staying abroad for a semester are required to obtain a visa. Students attending programs for which a visa is required would have received details about the visa application process with the API post-acceptance materials.

KEEP COPIES AND/OR A LIST OF THE FOLLOWING

THE STUDENT SHOULD HAVE A COPY AND THE PARENT/GUARDIAN SHOULD KEEP A COPY AT HOME

- Copies of the fronts and backs of credit cards (it is much easier to replace them if you have this) and contact phone numbers to cancel/replace them if necessary
- Passport number (and make several copies of the front pages)
- List of what is in each suitcase, so that in the event of lost or stolen luggage, one can easily know what is missing to file an insurance claim
- Flight itinerary(ies)

Packing and Luggage

Packing can be one of the most challenging issues that students deal with during the pre-departure phase. The majority of students say they packed too much for their session abroad, and we cannot stress enough the importance of not over-packing. An old adage for overseas packing is to pack the bare minimum and then cut that in half. Students will be able to purchase almost anything in the host country and that is advisable particularly for bulky items or small electronic items like hair dryers. U.S. models often will not work abroad because of different electrical voltage systems and plug prongs. We also recommend that students leave very valuable items at home.

Participants will see detailed packing recommendations in their orientation materials.

Luggage Tips

1. Students should not bring more than they can personally carry, especially since hotels and housing facilities may not have elevators.
2. Storage in the API accommodations will be minimal, as armoires often take the place of closets.
3. Students will want to buy things during their stay - souvenirs, clothing, small appliances, etc. If they max out the airline baggage restrictions on the way over, they will have even more problems on the way home.
4. Airlines have strict restrictions on the number of bags one can check, the weight of each bag and fees for checked baggage. Students should be familiar with their baggage policies, typically posted on the airline's website, for each airline they will fly with during the trip. Weigh bags BEFORE leaving for the airport!
5. Students should always prepare for delayed or lost luggage by packing a change of clothes and any other essentials (i.e., toothbrush, medication) in their carry-on bag. Many airlines and travel agencies offer insurance for lost or delayed luggage.

Based on past experience and the space available on API transportation, we suggest bringing AT MOST the following:

- 2 checked suitcases for a semester (1 up to 50 pounds; 1 up to 35 pounds); 1 suitcase for summer sessions
- 1 small item to carry-on (small backpack or duffel bag)

Electronics and Technology

Internet Access

Students in the U.S. are accustomed to constant and easy access to technology, and they are therefore surprised to find that these resources are often more limited abroad. All students will have access to internet in their housing, but they may find that it is not as reliable or fast as what they are accustomed to. In program locations where we have an API center, the center will be equipped with wireless internet and desktop computers for student use. Most host universities will also offer wireless and/or computer access. API will not necessarily be able to monitor or control the availability or reliability of the internet access in housing.

Electronics

Most students will travel abroad with a laptop, tablet, smart phone, and/or digital camera. We urge students to consider the following points in preparing to take electronics abroad.

- Since a computer will add to the electricity bill in the accommodations, students should always turn it off when they're not using it.
- Electronics can be targets for theft abroad since they are easily portable and valuable. We recommend that all students insure the devices they plan to take abroad. Many insurance companies will allow such items to be insured under a renter's insurance policy or a homeowner's policy. This should be done before leaving the U.S.
- Students should take one or more USB flash drives with them so they can back up their work and photos and keep them in a separate location from their laptop.
- Most electronic devices will only require an adapter for the type of plug used in the host country. A voltage converter is usually not required for newer devices because they are equipped to handle either 110 volts or 220 volts. This can be verified with the manufacturer, as well as whether traveling abroad will affect the validity of the device's warranty.
- Students traveling with smart phones should be familiar with their service providers' rates and policies for emailing, texting, web browsing and calling while traveling internationally.
- Having their familiar electronic devices at their fingertips may tempt students to spend too much time online, keeping up with everything going on at home. We encourage students to limit their time online so they do not regret missing opportunities to get involved in the host city.

Cultural Differences

Students will encounter many cultural differences as they adapt to living in a foreign country. We urge students to remember that they are not in a mini-America. Our goal as a program provider is to help students learn about and adjust to a new culture, rather than to provide an environment that mimics what they may be accustomed to in the U.S. For example, internet access is still not as widespread in homes abroad as it is in the U.S. If it is not standard for accommodations to have internet access in the host country, students may need to adjust to that local norm.

Students may feel uncomfortable living with or near people who are not similar to them (i.e. not American, not students). Many students, however, have their most valuable relationships abroad with people who are outside of their peer group. Parents/guardians should encourage students to embrace those relationships, whether it's with a younger sibling in the host family or an elderly shopkeeper. Those relationships will give the students a unique look into the community in which they are living, and they will have much to learn from those individuals. We will send more specific information as the session approaches to help students begin setting realistic expectations and to introduce some of the cultural differences they will encounter.

Culture Shock

All students, whether they realize it or not, will feel culture shock. These emotions are inevitable when a person completely changes their lifestyle, surroundings, food, and friends, even for a brief period of time. Everyone carries with them cultural "baggage", including their values and beliefs, family lifestyle, patterns of behavior, tastes and all the preconceived impressions they have about the country to which they are moving. Students will feel their home culture challenged, modified, stretched, changed and contrasted by the new culture. Each student will react differently to the uncomfortable feeling of culture shock. Culture shock can be plotted on a roller coaster curve. Keep in mind where your student is on the roller coaster, knowing that it goes up and down throughout the term, so that you can be prepared to help effectively.

At the beginning of a session, students are often on the high of the roller coaster. Everything they are experiencing is new, exciting and wonderful! After some time passes, however, students may begin to be critical of their new city and family, or the school, or the way shopkeepers operate. All the things that are different, that they initially were fascinated with, may become annoyances. It is important for students and parents/guardians to remember that students' emotions will balance out as the session progresses. The highs and lows of the first few weeks will pass, and students will soon begin to feel comfortable and balanced in their new environment.

If you receive a distressed call from your student early in the program, keep in mind that in the excitement and stress of the first weeks, even the most minor issue can seem like a major crisis. Issues that they would have dealt with seamlessly on their home campus may seem to them like insurmountable problems. If this happens, we would advise you to react calmly and help the student to consider what steps he or she can take to solve the problem. Remind your student to think about how they would have handled a similar issue at home. Help him or her to think objectively, rather than emotionally, about the issue at hand. Encourage your student to integrate by seeking help from local staff or faculty, or by finding a way to get involved in the host city.

Usually, the best first step is having the student speak with his or her on-site director(s). Our on-site staff is very experienced in helping students deal with culture shock or other issues that arise, and they can provide a welcome perspective or good suggestions for getting past the issue. Depending on the student's personality and interests, integration may mean finding a volunteer opportunity or breaking away from the American group of students for a period.

When students come to us expressing feelings of sadness or homesickness, we usually advise them to wait a week or two to see if things improve. Some students have trouble in the beginning of the program before classes begin because they have too much free time in which to worry or think about home. Students generally start to feel better once classes start and they get into a routine. If a student's feelings are severe or do not abate with some time, API directors can make a recommendation for a local counselor.

Most students will overcome these feelings and soon will be saddened by the thought of returning to the U.S. In rare cases, a student cannot move past their feelings of homesickness or anxiety and chooses to return home. API will, of course, support a student in this decision, but it can be a complex decision financially and academically. Once a session has started, API has limited options for providing a refund of fees paid because many of our arrangements are made and paid for prior to the program start date. This decision can pose difficulties academically when the student has not done enough work to get credit for courses started abroad and it is too late to enroll at their home institution for the session.

Reverse Culture Shock

When your student returns home, you might think that he or she will be “back to normal”, but the transition to home can be just as difficult as the transition to abroad. Individuals feel changed as a result of their experience living and learning abroad. Their perceptions, attitudes, patterns, and preferences will have grown and stretched. Students are often shocked by some of the habits and lifestyles in the U.S. that they used to take for granted and are now rediscovering. They may want to forget some of the lifestyle patterns here in the U.S. in favor of the new ones they will have acquired. Have patience with your student as he or she is critical of norms in the U.S., talks constantly about his or her experience abroad, or acts homesick for his or her “home” abroad. This is a normal part of the readjustment process.

We encourage students to concentrate on bringing some of the host culture home with them, and incorporating what they have learned about different people, places and cultures into their life and future involvements. The international office on their home university campus may have opportunities for them to get involved either with students visiting the U.S. from other countries, or with American students planning to go abroad. The coping techniques they developed abroad can be used to their advantage in dealing with the ups and downs at home. You will likely see changes in your student too, hopefully all for the better, as they will have matured and had a truly independent experience.

Housing

API on-site directors work closely with local hosts and housing agencies to find the best available housing for all of our students. Students complete housing forms to inform API of their housing preferences. API then uses this information to place the student with a host that meets as many of the student’s preferences as possible. API hosts are all selected and screened by our on-site staff. The majority of families have hosted students for many years and all new families are oriented by API resident directors and trained about their obligations toward the student.

Whether students elect to live with a host family, in a student apartment, or within a residence hall, they should be prepared to live up to 45 minutes from the host school or internship placement. When institutions are located outside of the city center, API generally seeks to minimize the distance to the school, rather than to place students close to shopping or entertainment districts. API always encourages students to travel with other API students if returning home after dark, and to reserve room in their budgets to take an occasional taxi home when socializing late into the evening.

In the event of egregious damages to the housing during the student’s stay, the student(s) responsible will be asked to make a payment on-site for the repair or replacement. Fees may also be added to the student’s account after the conclusion of the program if damages were undetected prior to check-out or fees were unpaid on-site.

ON-SITE CONSIDERATIONS



Students and Staff: Arrival and Orientation Procedures

API has staff in each host city who act as our Resident Coordinators/Directors (RC/RDs). API RCs/RDs are typically either citizens or long-term residents of the host county. They work closely with the API office in the pre-departure period to secure housing placements, plan the itinerary, and make other necessary arrangements in advance of the students' arrival. They are the primary point person for students once they arrive on-site and have availability 24/7 for emergencies. Students usually say that their RC/RD was the best thing about their program and an invaluable resource for everything from practical tips about living in the host city to advice about integrating successfully into the host culture. RCs/RDs should be the first line of contact for your student when problems arise abroad. In the event that your student encounters significant difficulties on-site, please encourage him/her to seek assistance first from the on-site director, who is best equipped to help.

Students do not need to arrive before the designated arrival date in order to have time to settle in. The arrival date allows for several days of orientation and settling before classes or the internship begins. The API orientation period is typically an important time for students to begin adjusting to their temporary "home", to meet their on-site directors and fellow program participants, to learn more about life in their new host country, and to become familiar with API policies and safety rules. Where possible, we will conduct meetings in person or hold outdoor activities, such as walking tours. The goal is for students to have a chance to combine important orientation sessions with sightseeing activities, in order to gradually appreciate their new surroundings!

During the orientation period, API directors give students extensive health and safety information. API students are given advice about what areas of the city to avoid at certain times and how to carry belongings in such a way as to deter theft.

After this orientation period, periodic group meetings will continue, along with scheduled cultural activities and day or overnight trips on select weekends throughout the session. Students receive a detailed itinerary with excursion dates in their final packet, sent two to four weeks prior to the program start date.

Family Visits

Many parents/guardians want to take the opportunity to visit their student while they are abroad, and we encourage family visits! We advise parents that the best time to visit is NOT the first week of the program. We generally do not encourage parents, guardians or friends to accompany their student to the program site because the first week of the program is very busy. Students will be occupied with orientation sessions, city tours and getting to know their peers. It is important that the student is able to focus on absorbing the information and adjusting to the new environment. Further, we cannot allow guests to participate in orientation activities.

Students will receive a program itinerary in their final packet, which is sent approximately three weeks prior to the program start date. We recommend that parents/guardians wait to receive the itinerary before scheduling a visit. In some cases, it may even be better to wait until your student arrives on-site to be sure to schedule around important academic events or trips that the student plans after arrival. Hotel information will be included in the final packet as well.

On program excursions during the session, if a family member is visiting during a scheduled API day or overnight trip, the following policy applies: Family and friends may accompany students on day trips if space allows. On overnight excursions, guests would have to pay an additional fee for transportation and accommodation costs. The student should make arrangements with the on-site staff for guests on excursions.

Guests are not permitted to stay in student housing. API policies, and local housing regulations in some cases, prohibit overnight guests in program housing. This policy does pertain to family members. Upon request, API can provide you with a list of recommended hotels, or your student may be able to make a recommendation after they arrive in their host city.

Staying in Touch

We always remind students during orientation to call their parents/guardians; however, students inevitably get busy and forget to make that important phone call! Remember that the first week is very busy and the students are tired and somewhat overwhelmed. Even if your student is normally very communicative, don't be surprised if you don't receive a call immediately upon arrival. If, for any reason, a student does not arrive as scheduled, the international director will notify API staff in the U.S. and we will call the student's designated emergency contact.

During the session abroad, most students will rely on cell phones, Skype, and/or calling cards to communicate with friends and family in the U.S. Below we have provided some guidance on each of those options so that you and your student can make a good decision about how to communicate with one another. Due to the time difference, many families find it convenient to set up in advance a time each week to call or Skype.

Cell Phones

Making decisions about cell phone usage while abroad is challenging, and the bottom line is that cell phone use abroad is often expensive. The primary options for students are to 1) use their own cell phone with an international plan or 2) use their own cell phone with an international SIM card purchased after arrival on-site (phone must be unlocked). Some students use a combination of methods, including apps for international texting and calling on their computer or phone. For safety reasons, we recommend that every student have a cell phone that works on local cellular networks, as opposed to relying on wifi. This is required for participants in our Internship programs.

Mail and Packages

Students will receive details in their final packets about where they should have mail sent. In some locations, it is best to send letters or packages to the student's accommodations, whereas in other situations, the school or API office will be preferred. Students will receive their addresses in their final packets before they leave the United States. Students should not count on receiving packages quickly, and parents/guardians/friends wishing to send packages towards the end of the session would be better off holding them until they return home.

Airmail letters and postcards to/from the United States take a minimum of 7-10 days to be delivered. Airmail packages take a minimum of 2-3 weeks for delivery. Items shipped by sea can take 3 months or longer. Other carriers such as FedEx can take up to a week or longer. A delivery company will typically make two attempts to deliver the package, and after two attempts, they will store the package in their office for pick up by the recipient.

When senders ship packages from the U.S., they typically will complete a form from the U.S. Customs Office stating the contents and monetary value of the package. If a high dollar amount is declared for the package for an expensive item like a laptop or phone, the sender or recipient may be charged a corresponding customs charge. Usually, the sender can indicate that duties and taxes should be billed to the sender rather than the recipient. It is not possible to know in advance if fees will be charged or how much they will be; the amount depends on the customs evaluation of the value of the package and the insurance value declared. Indicating a large value or insurance amount will increase the likelihood of taxes and duties. Unless your shipment needs to be insured, you should assign a low value on the customs form for all items being shipped. When the package arrives in-country, it may be screened by customs, and this could result in delivery delays. In some cases, the recipient will be required to retrieve the package from customs in person. If fees are charged to the recipient, (s)he will be required to pay the customs fees in cash when retrieving the package.

We do not recommend mailing medicine or electronics due to the likelihood that they will be held at customs, sometimes indefinitely. Insuring the package is a personal choice based on the value of the item(s) and whether or not you want to be reimbursed if the package were to get lost or damaged. We recommend that you verify specific information with the international carrier being used (UPS, DHL, Fed EX, etc).

What To Do About Money Abroad

Students will need spending money for any additional traveling they choose to do outside of the program, entertainment, food during the program and on excursions, personal shopping, souvenirs and presents for friends/family, etc. The amount each person spends will vary greatly depending on personal spending habits and resources. For current exchange rates, refer to www.xe.com.

Forms Of Money To Take – Diversify!

Most students will access funds from their U.S. bank account or use credit cards during their session abroad. In many countries, opening a bank account is either not possible for short-term students or too arduous a process to be worthwhile. One notable exception to this rule is in Ireland, where the process to open an account is not too difficult and having a local bank account may be required as part of the immigration process. We recommend that students have various means of accessing money so that they can be prepared if something unexpected occurs.

Cash

- Before leaving the U.S. students should order some local currency from their bank for any initial expenses that come up such as a taxi fare. Students should not travel with too much cash, so we recommend taking the equivalent of US\$100-\$200 in local currency.
- Most banks need a minimum of 24 hours to provide foreign currency.
- It's also a good idea to take some dollars (\$40-\$60) so that students have an "emergency fund" on hand..

ATM Cards

Using local ATMs to withdraw cash from the U.S. bank account is the most convenient method of obtaining cash while overseas. Students get local currency at competitive exchange rates, but most banks will charge a transaction fee.

- Ensure that the card will function in a foreign country. The card must have a numeric (number, not letter) PIN.
- Verify what transaction fees the bank will assess.
- Students may be charged a transaction fee from their U.S. bank and a fee from the foreign bank who owns the ATM.
- Ask the U.S. bank if they have a partnership with any banks in the country where your student will be living. Using a partner bank abroad can lower or eliminate transaction fees.
- Notify the bank that the cardholder will be traveling so the bank doesn't assume the card has been stolen and deactivate it for potential fraudulent activity.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are also widely accepted and a good way to purchase items overseas. The benefit to using credit cards is that you can receive the best exchange rate on the market. It is also convenient not to have to carry paper money around and risk losing it.

- Unlike in the U.S., credit cards are not accepted at virtually every place of business. Many bars, cafes and small restaurants in Europe and Latin America only take cash.
- Most credit card companies and the bank that issued your card will charge an exchange fee for each transaction, which can be 1-3% of the total payment. If a vendor asks if you want the card charged in local currency or dollars, choose local currency for the best exchange rate.
- Visa is the more widely accepted credit card, followed by MasterCard. American Express and Discover credit cards are rarely accepted.
- Most U.S. credit cards now have Chip technology instead of the magnetic strip. This is the system that is used in most other countries as well, although they usually require a PIN instead of a signature to verify identity. You may not need it, but ask your bank for your card's PIN so that you can be prepared if required.
- The cardholder should let the credit card company know that the card will be used for purchases outside of the U.S. so that the company doesn't assume the card has been stolen. Also, be sure that the student writes down the direct line (not the 800#) from the back of the credit card in case they need to call to cancel the card.

In the Event of Loss

Pick-pocketing and purse snatching are unfortunately common occurrences in many countries. If your student loses his or her wallet or purse, take the following steps:

- Cancel all credit cards and ATM cards immediately to avoid fraudulent use.
- If using ApplePay, change the card in order to have a means of payment until the new card arrives.
- Secure replacement card(s) to mail to the student.

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION



Health Considerations

The following list outlines steps a student should take prior to beginning a program.

Research

- The embassy of the host country is a good resource for understanding the scope of the outbreak in the country, as well as the entry requirements.
- We recommend the CDC website as a resource for required and recommended vaccines for the destination country or countries: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list>

Note: Other resources for health and medical information are listed at the end of this section.

Inform

- It is very important that students fully disclose all medical conditions to API prior to the program. The student should complete the API Health & Wellness Form thoroughly so that API staff is aware of medical conditions, medications the student is taking and any requests for special accommodations.
- Students with conditions that may require emergency care should consider how they will communicate this to API on-site resident directors and their host family or other staff. Depending on the condition, students may want to carry some form of ID (tag, bracelet, etc.) indicating the nature of the problem and what to do in the event that they become unconscious or incapacitated. This type of information should also be disclosed on the API Medical Form.

Prepare

- Students should have a dental check-up and complete medical exam prior to their departure. They should discuss their travel plans with their physician(s) or a travel medicine specialist to get recommendations on vaccinations or other necessary preparations.
- Given the additional stresses of living in a new country, students who are currently under the care of a physician are strongly recommended to discuss their travel plans with a doctor here in the United States. Some issues that should be discussed with a doctor include:
 - How the stress of a new environment and language might affect a student's physical and mental health
 - Whether to seek a physician's care or therapy abroad
 - How to obtain regularly needed medication (if applicable)
 - How to properly adjust medication schedules to prepare for time changes
- Students who regularly take medication, either prescription or over the counter, should consider how they will continue with this regimen while abroad. More details regarding taking prescriptions abroad follow. Some suggestions of over the counter medicines that any student might want to take abroad include:
 - Headache/pain reliever medicine (Tylenol, Motrin, Advil, Aleve, etc.)
 - Stomach settlers (Pepto-Bismol or Imodium A-D)
 - Vitamin C/Multivitamin

Prescription medications

Students who are currently taking prescription medication must discuss their travel abroad plan with their physician. Ideally, students would be able to take a large enough supply of medication to last for the duration of their time abroad. Some students will find it difficult to obtain more than a 30-day supply of any particular medication from the doctor or pharmacist. Consequently, to continue to have access to medication, students may be required to consult a physician during their time abroad, or a family member who is planning to visit the student abroad could bring a supply renewal.

Drug classifications differ from country to country, meaning that a drug that is regularly prescribed in the U.S. could be unavailable or considered illegal in the foreign country. Students traveling with any prescription medications must bring a letter from their doctor with them to show that a physician has prescribed the drug in question to the student. This letter should indicate both the generic and brand name of the medication they are carrying; it should also provide information about why the student is taking it. Students must also carry all medication in its original containers; in the event that customs officials need to search the traveler's bags, they will understand that the medication was prescribed by a doctor. It is also highly recommended that travelers bring a copy of all prescription(s). This also would make it easier for a local physician to more easily verify the dosage and type of medication prescribed.

After the student has arrived

In most program sites, students may choose to drink tap water, but it is recommended that visitors drink bottled water initially to give their body time to adjust to any new organisms. As with any place, there will be new bacteria in the water, air and food that the visitor's body is not accustomed to. At the beginning of the program, students may find that their stomach is upset from time to time, so students may want to have some Pepto-Bismol or Imodium A-D on hand. In general, as in the U.S., students tend to get sick when they become overextended. Encourage your student to get plenty of rest and eat properly.

Pharmacies are easily found in all API program sites, and our local staff can provide recommendations. Many locals solicit guidance from the pharmacist the way Americans seek advice from a general practitioner. If a student is feeling sick, he or she may try asking a pharmacist what they would recommend (note: medications recommended by a pharmacist may be as strong as some prescription drugs, so students should be sure to watch for side effects and consult a doctor immediately if they have any concerns). Students may also want to contact their physician in the U.S. to confirm a diagnosis or medication prescribed on-site. Students should be aware of any allergies they have to medications so that they can inform the local doctor or pharmacist of these.

Once abroad, all students receive an on-site handbook with specific information about local clinics, hospitals and doctors. Students who wish to be connected to a doctor in their host city before they arrive on-site are encouraged to contact the API office. While API cannot guarantee the availability of English-speaking doctors onsite, our staff members abroad are happy to make inquiries on a student's behalf; likewise, our U.S.-based staff is happy to make recommendations about which sites may best accommodate a student's specific health needs.

HELPFUL HEALTH LINKS

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- Department of State, Overseas Citizens Services:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go.html>
- SelectWisely: www.selectwisely.com. This is a great resource for travelers with food allergies.

DISABILITIES AND ACCESS ABROAD

- The University of Pittsburgh has developed a film and accompanying booklet called Making it Happen, which focuses on students with disabilities going abroad. <http://vimeo.com/9322659>
- Check out the International Disability News Ticker, with links to news stories on disability from around the world. www.abilityinfo.com
- Inclusion International calls itself "a global federation of family-based organizations advocating for the human rights of persons with intellectual disabilities worldwide." www.inclusion-international.org
- Mobility International – MI's mission is "to empower people with disabilities around the world through international exchange, information, technical assistance and training; and to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in international exchange and development programs." www.miusa.org

Insurance

Medical Insurance

API provides medical insurance for all program participants.

Basic Policy Parameters (details of coverage can be found [here](#)):

- Coverage goes into effect on the start date of the program. It terminates on the end date of the program, or the date of the individual's return to the U.S., if that is before the scheduled program end date.
- If a participant has travel plans before or after the program dates, we encourage them to contact us about extending the coverage to accommodate the additional travel dates.
- The coverage applies in any country outside of the participant's home country.
- The coverage maximum is \$500,000 per covered injury or illness.
- Participants should stay enrolled in their U.S. healthcare plan while they are abroad to ensure continuity of coverage in the event of an early return home.
- The policy does have some exclusions, which are detailed in the coverage brochure linked above, but in general, participants will be able to seek reimbursement for most hospital or doctor's visits.
- Mental health coverage is included in the policy parameters.
- The policy does not cover preventive care or screening for possible medical conditions.

How It Works

- If an individual gets sick during the program, they should first check the Passport Handbook for a recommended doctor or clinic, and/or ask their local Resident Coordinator/Director for a suggestion.
- In most cases, individuals will need to pay for the visit at the time of service, though direct payment is possible in the event of larger claims.
- The individual should keep the receipt and all medical documentation, ensure that a diagnosis is listed and submit a claim form to the insurance provider.

- Claims must be submitted within 90 days of the treatment. API cannot submit claims on a participant's behalf, nor can we file a dispute with the insurance provider in the event that a claim is denied.

Given confidentiality concerns, students and parents will need to work directly with the insurance company regarding coverage and claim questions.

Additional Provisions

- Accidental Death and Dismemberment coverage of \$20,000. Each student is asked to name a beneficiary on the notarized agreement he/she is asked to return to API.
- Medical Evacuation in the event of a medical emergency that cannot be treated on-site or will require significant continued treatment best facilitated in the U.S.
- Security evacuation up to \$100,000. This includes evacuation in the event of a natural disaster, or security/political threat.
- Quarantine benefit of up to \$2,000 can provide reimbursement of housing, meal and travel expenses related to a government-required quarantine period.

Cancellation and Interruption Coverage

Given continued uncertainties associated with international travel, API recommends and is making available added insurance protection for program cancellation or interruption. Purchasing this added coverage can decrease the risk of financial loss related to the inability to travel for any reason prior to the program start or due to premature return from abroad. Click [here](#) for more details.

Student Safety Procedures

Academic Programs International (API) believes in the value of intercultural experiences through travel abroad, for the purpose of exposing American and international students to the diversity that other cultures and peoples bring to our world. The continuing state of world affairs, including continued references to anti-Americanism, threats by extremists, and potential pandemics in the U.S. media, may lead students to question the wisdom of traveling abroad. Along with our colleagues in the field of International Education, we at API believe that receiving a global education is essential if we are to change the state of world affairs. Developing cultural sensitivity and dispelling ethnocentric thought are key components of inspiring peace, promoting global understanding and confronting challenges such as global pandemics. Additionally, the experience continues to provide a unique and unsurpassed opportunity for personal growth; encouraging students to develop a greater sense of confidence and personal accomplishment, as well as offering the possibility to master a new language.

As you wrestle with the questions of "what if?" and "what next?" we want to outline some of API's policies and the systems we have in place abroad for communication and emergency procedures.

API U.S. staff can be reached in the event of an emergency by calling the main API office at 512-600- 8900. After hours, callers can reach our answering service by following the automated prompts.

All API students receive a wallet-size card when they arrive that lists local emergency numbers, the API on-site director's name, address, telephone numbers, and email address, as well as the API U.S. number. This ensures that all students can carry important emergency contact numbers with them at all times.

API requires students who are U.S. citizens to register with the U.S. State Department, which will register their travel plans with both the U.S. State Department and the embassy for their destination country. Once an individual has registered a trip, the U.S. State Department will email the individual if a warning, alert or other pertinent information is released about that destination. The registration is very important in the event of a situation that would require notification or evacuation of American citizens.

On-site directors have a health and safety orientation session at the beginning of each term, and remind students throughout the program of general safety measures they should follow.

Students are asked to give the on-site directors written notice of where and when they will be traveling outside of the API program excursions.

In the event of an emergency, there is a designated meeting area. Students are notified of specific emergency policies and meeting locations upon arrival.

If API deems the country or particular city unsafe for American students, the on-site directors will assist students in making the necessary arrangements for evacuation. If the U.S. mandates evacuation for all American citizens from foreign countries, both the on-site directors and the consulates will assist in evacuating students.

API health & safety team members receive daily updates from the U.S. State Department and the country-specific consulates. These, along with local news outlets, are closely monitored for information on recommendations for Americans living abroad.

In the event of an emergency affecting the entire group, API will keep parents/guardians informed via email or messages posted on our website.

In the event of political tension, students will be advised of security measures that are deemed prudent. In general, we always advise students to avoid political "hot spots", demonstrations, American franchises, and/or other politically or socially controversial activities. Demonstrations and strikes are more common in many parts of the world than they are in the U.S. If we are aware that demonstrations will be occurring, we will send an advisory to students with the anticipated time and location of the event so that they can make plans to avoid the affected area(s). Students should know where the U.S. consulate is located and exercise good judgment when getting involved in local activities. They should also be aware of current events in the world in which the U.S. is involved that might spur tensions abroad.

If an emergency occurs at home and you need to communicate information to your student, you may notify the API U.S. office and we can ask API staff on-site to be available to provide support and assistance to your student. If you learn of a

potentially dangerous situation where your child is living, first contact your student to verify his or her safety. Secondly, call the API office to ensure that we are also aware of the situation.

Staying Safe While Abroad

API staff will review safety procedures with students during orientation on-site, including safe behavior, unsafe areas of the host city, and steps students should take if they need help or are the victim of a crime. Some common risk factors for crimes that occur abroad are:

- Walking alone at night
- Leaving doors or windows unlocked
- Having poor judgment due to alcohol or drug use
- Breaking host laws
- Dressing provocatively
- Bringing strangers or new friends home
- Carrying too many valuables

API staff will caution students to avoid such behaviors in order to minimize the risk of being a victim of crime. They will also review how standards differ in the host country regarding these behaviors. For example, what may be considered appropriate attire in the U.S. may be considered immodest or provocative in the host country.

Drinking

Alcohol is not permitted on high school programs. On programs for college-age students, we advise students of local drinking laws and norms as laws and practices related to alcohol are very different in other parts of the world. Even if students will be able to legally drink in their host country, we do enforce certain limitations on when and where they can consume alcohol for reasons of safety and cultural integration. We prohibit students from drinking during program-sponsored events and activities and in their host families (unless the host provides alcohol to the student with a meal).

It is also the position of API that students should refrain from drinking to the point of intoxication. When students are drunk or under the influence, accidents and injuries are most likely to occur. Students will find that many families or local friends enjoy a glass of wine with meals and on special occasions, and that young people “hang out” in bars and cafés and have a beer. Students must know and respect their limits. Drunk Americans stand out and can become easy targets for unwanted attention.

Drugs

We strongly emphasize with students that API does not tolerate or condone the use of illegal drugs and that the penalties for possession and use of drugs can be very harsh in other countries. A student’s status as an American will NOT exempt him/her from the laws against drugs in the host country, and the American embassy will not be able or allowed to reduce the penalty. Any student known to be using, selling or in any other way involved with illegal drugs will be dismissed from the program.

Disciplinary Policies

Students sign the API Code of Conduct in their APIConnect account during onboarding. We have established our program policies to ensure that all students have a safe and comfortable session. If a student violates the API Code of Conduct, s/he will first be given a verbal warning, unless the first violation warrants more serious consequences. A subsequent violation would result in a written warning, and the student’s home university would be notified of that written warning. In cases of severe misbehavior or if we are concerned for a student’s health, we may notify the student’s designated emergency contact. Serious disciplinary infractions can result in a student’s dismissal from program housing, excursion(s) or the program entirely.

Local Laws and Victim’s Rights

Students are subject to local laws while they are in the host country. In locations where local law differs substantially from U.S. law, as in the Middle East, on-site staff will review those differences with students during orientation. API staff cannot intervene on behalf of a student if he or she violates local law(s). If a student is the victim of a crime, API on-site staff can assist the student in filing a police report.

Appendix A: Health and Safety Links

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC)

Provides country-specific information about recommended vaccinations, local food and water conditions, and other pertinent health information for the informed traveler.

www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Provides worldwide travel warnings and safety alerts

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

and has a page dedicated to study abroad students at

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-with-special-considerations/students.html>

INCLUSION INTERNATIONAL

“a global federation of family-based organizations advocating for the human rights of persons with intellectual disabilities worldwide.”

www.inclusion-international.org

MOBILITY INTERNATIONAL (MI)

MI’s mission is “to empower people with disabilities around the world through international exchange, information, technical assistance and training; and to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in international exchange and development programs.

www.miusa.org

OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL (OSAC)

OSAC joint venture of the U.S. Department of State and the private sector that aims “to establish a continuing liaison between security officials in both the private and public sector; to provide for regular exchanges of information concerning developments in the overseas security environment; recommend methods for planning and implementation of security programs abroad; and recommend methods to mitigate risks to American private sector interests worldwide.”

www.osac.gov