

# USC DORNSIFE OFFICE OF OVERSEAS STUDIES

## TRAVEL 101 WORKSHOP

### TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS & BOOKING TIPS



#### International Airfare

- One option for students is STA Travel. STA Travel is a travel agency that specializes in student travel and offers student & youth discounts on a wide range of travel products. You can book on their website, <http://www.statravel.com/> or over the phone (1-800-535-7172).
- There are many other booking options available, StudentUniverse.com, Expedia, Kayak, Orbitz, etc. Check Skyscanner & Google Flights.

#### Airfare Booking Tips:

- Book early! Flying on Mon-Thurs. can be cheaper. Saturday is cheapest day on weekend to travel, Friday & Sunday most expensive.
- Look for student airfare like STA's Blue ticket (discounted, low change fee, flexible).
- Decide if price or flexibility is more important. Consider change and cancellation penalties.
- HIDDEN fees! Look at ticket as a whole and with taxes included.
- DON'T book flights before determining your travel plans! Some flights are non-refundable.
- **Book Now Pay Later Program:** STA Travel deposit program for study abroad students, which allows you to reserve and lock-in a student airfare rate by paying a deposit (\$49 - \$300). You can pay the rest of your airfare balance 7 days before your flight. Call 1-800-535-7172 to book.
- Nonstop vs. connecting flights. Be sure to have substantial time in connecting airport (min 1.5 hours, sometimes more).
- Consider a multi-city / open-jaw ticket - get creative with routing!
- AVOID mixed-carrier tickets, these can be more expensive.
- Get the most bang for your buck with free or inexpensive stopovers! Ex. Fiji en route to Australia, London en route to Cape Town. Check if you need a transit visa for stopover location.
- In general, AVOID booking two one-way tickets if trying to save \$\$ **NEVER book a one way ticket without a return ticket!!**
- For student tickets, you will need to purchase an ISIC card, which gives you student discounts worldwide.
- Be mindful of airport locations. Some tickets and discount airlines may seem like a good deal but are located far from your destination city, which adds transit time and costs.

#### Accommodations

- Before booking, always check a hotel/hostels' neighborhood on Yelp or TripAdvisor, to check the safety of the area and proximity to the sights you want to see. Good rule of thumb to avoid the areas around train stations.

- **Hostels:** Hostelling International, Hostelworld. May require a Hostelling International membership card to book. Check Yelp for reviews and do not bring valuables, keep passport on you, etc, as you will be sharing space in dorm rooms.
- **Airbnb:** Very popular option but keep in mind your safety. Better to travel with friends, rather than booking a room on your own in a house of strangers. Airbnb has had some safety issues in the past.
- **Couchsurfing:** Not recommended, not a very safe option.



## Transport

- **Discount airlines:** Cheap seats but sometimes airports are far away from major cities. Also check the fees for check-in luggage, carry-on and baggage allowances, extra hidden fees, etc.
- **Metro:** Use your local university student ID card to get discounted student passes for urban transportation system.
- **Trains:** In many countries train travel is the most direct and efficient way to get from city to city, and you also get to see more of the countries you're travelling through. Some have student or other discounted tickets and it's best to book in advance. There are also no baggage fees.
  - **Eurail pass:** only consider this if you are travelling extensively through multiple countries in Europe. Otherwise individual tickets or discount airlines might be more cost-effective. Be aware of time limits, typically the pass is only valid for a short period of time. Same advice applies for Japan Rail.
  - **Eurostar** train between London & Paris: Quicker than a flight between these cities, and you can get discounted tickets in advance.
- **Buses:** Companies like Bolt bus & Megabus offer a low cost way to travel if you're willing to travel long hours, sometimes on overnight buses.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

- **STAY ATTENTIVE!** Always be aware of your surroundings, and even if you aren't sure where you're going, act like you know where you're headed. Staring at your phone or appearing to be lost can make you an easy target. Public places like tourist spots and public buses & subways are notorious for pickpockets.
- Avoid public demonstrations & other civil disturbances, or "soft targets" where many tourists gather.
- Do not walk around alone at night, keep a buddy system.
- Be cautious with strangers, more so than you would be here. Never forget that you are in a completely new environment and you don't necessarily understand all social cues & expectations.
- **ALCOHOL:** It is very easy to lose your inhibitions & sense of awareness when intoxicated, and this often leads to dangerous situations abroad. Be mindful of your limit, look out for yourself and your peers, and do not put yourself into a vulnerable state.
- Be sure to leave your valuables at home!:
  - Keep it simple while traveling and don't carry lots of cash or expensive items.
  - Keep your belongings close to you (ex: in a cross-body bag on the metro, or even a money belt when traveling on trains/buses/flights.)
  - Review the contents of your wallet and remove unnecessary credit cards, Social Security card and other valuable items.
- **NEVER hitchhike!** It's also VERY risky to drive abroad!
- **Taxis:** only take taxis clearly identified with official markings, no unmarked cabs. Make sure the meter is on.

- On overnight trains be sure to lock your compartment, but if sharing with others, tie down your bags and sleep on top of your valuables. Keep important documents and money in a money belt.
- Be mindful of cultural norms: ways of dress, customs and behavior. It is a good idea to act and dress more conservatively when traveling, it's best not to stick out too much.
- Take good care of your health and stay hydrated! Be sure to rest up and don't overdo it.
- Beware of travel scams – pickpockets, invites to tea (that end up costing a fortune), overnight trains/buses (theft).
- If you are the victim of any form of sexual harassment or assault, seek medical attention & notify your program staff so they can help you. You also have access to RSVP's services abroad, including post-assault counseling: <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/> and 213-740-4900.
- State Dept. Resources: Register for the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](https://studentsabroad.state.gov/) and check out [studentsabroad.state.gov/](https://studentsabroad.state.gov/)

**In the event of an emergency such as a terrorist attack or natural disaster: YOU MUST CHECK-IN AS SAFE WITH USC AND YOUR FAMILY!** Watch for emails from USC.

### **OTHER TIPS:**

- Get to know your host culture first before traveling to many different countries: traveling within your host country and city will help you to get a much deeper sense of connection to that local culture, while spending a day in many different capitols will only check-off destinations on your list.
- Get off the beaten path!
- Be flexible and open to new experiences – half the adventure is getting used to the unexpected!



### **GETTING READY TO GO ABROAD!**

#### **Preparing for your trip**

- Apply for your passport and any necessary visas, checking regulations for all countries you're visiting! Many require that your passport be valid for 3 months – 1 year after you leave the country. Update your vaccinations!
- Backup copies: Photocopy your passport photo, signature & visa pages, and keep separate from your actual passport. Leave your passport locked away in your room, only carry a passport photocopy. Also photocopy your credit/debit cards front and back & keep separate from your cards.
- You can also scan important documents and store them on Google Drive.
- Download Google maps for destination cities, & Google translate app, for when you don't have access to wifi. However, you should still follow your instincts and remember to be safe! Google maps could direct you through an unsafe area, so stay aware of your surroundings and be smart!
- Call your bank and credit card companies! Notify them of all travel plans out of the country. Look into travel debit cards with no foreign transaction fees.
- Exchange some foreign currency (about \$50 worth max) before you depart; you'll find the best exchange rate at your bank (and at ATMs abroad after you depart). Avoid airport currency exchange booths (highest rates). When you arrive at your destination, use ATMS to get cash. You're charged a fee each time you use your credit card and rely more on cash than cards, so withdraw cash for a few days at a time from ATMs (if you're traveling, use a money belt to keep the cash safe, but while on your program you can lock the cash in your room).

- Call your phone provider! Get an international plan to avoid call & data roaming charges, or ask them to unlock your SIM so you can buy a new one in your host country. Look up the country codes you need to call abroad.
- Let a friend, family member or program staff know about your travel plans.
- Download the International SOS app.

### Packing Tips & List

- Do yourself a favor and PACK LIGHT!
- Roll your clothes or use vacuum bags to save space in your suitcase.
- A carry-on size rolling suitcase or a backpack are great options for a short trip.
- Put your name, address and telephone numbers inside and outside each piece of luggage.
- Bring a guide book –wifi access not always available.
- City map or pocket guide (London A-Z, Paris Pratique). Download CityMapper app.
- Electrical adapters & converters for countries you're visiting. Leave hairdryers/ straighteners/ electric razors behind & purchase these abroad, as US models are often not able to handle the higher voltages used overseas.
- Padlock for hostel lockers or a small padlock for your baggage.
- COMFORTABLE SHOES!
- Kleenex – many public restrooms don't have toilet paper.
- Anti-bacterial hand gel or disinfectant wipes.
- Fold-up tote or small duffel bag – pack this so you can bring back purchases at the end of your trip.
- Prescription medications (fill all before you leave, always keep in original container, and bring a letter from your physician or the prescription note in case you are asked questions at Customs. Some medications are illegal abroad - check with International SOS).
- Program acceptance documents – bring these when you cross borders, in case you are asked to show proof of your program when returning to your host country.
- Zip-lock bags to pack liquids.
- Depending on the destination: sunscreen, insect repellent, small first aid kit with bandaids, pain/fever reliever, anti-diarrheal antibiotics, toiletries.
- Important contact numbers and addresses.



**If you have further questions, don't hesitate to reach out! Utilize your study abroad network and contact Alums, Ambassadors & the peers on your program for helpful tips.**

**You can also reach our office at:**

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