

# 1 Preparing to go abroad

So you've decided to study abroad! Studying in another country is more than just a degree: it's an experience. You won't just be going to classes, you'll be adapting to a new culture, new people, and new places. Make sure your experience is as positive as possible by finding out as much as you can. The more research you do before you leave, the easier life will be when you arrive. Here are some things you can do before you go.

## **Do:**

- Talk to other people who have studied in the same institution or town.
- Read the website of the institution where you will be studying. Some institutions have webpages with information for international students.
- Read about the town where you will live, not just the country in general.

## **Don't:**

- Don't always assume what you see on TV shows or read in news reports is 100% correct. The job of TV and news reports is making a good story about a country, not necessarily informing people about everyday life there.
- Don't assume that all the people in countries like the UK, US, and Australia are white and English-speaking. These countries have immigrants from all over the world.

## **Preparing for your first week**

The first week in your study country will be both exciting and overwhelming. There will be many things you need to

organize: finding your way to and around campus, registering for your course or classes, and making decisions about your studies and accommodation. Here are useful terms to know when you arrive.

### **Orientation Week**

Most institutions provide information about the course and campus in the week before classes start or the first week of the semester/term. This week is called Orientation Week, Welcome Week, Freshman Week, or Freshers' Week.

### **Registration Day**

Registration Day (or Enrollment Day) is when students confirm what they are studying and get their ID card. This may happen on campus on a specific day or online. Find out what documents you need for Registration Day and bring them with you.

### **Course of study**

Most majors/courses are made up of several units/classes each taught by a different professor or tutor. In the UK the term "lecturer" is also used.

**Pre-requisite:** A pre-requisite is a unit/class you must take before you can study something else.

**Required/Compulsory:** A required class is a class which every student in the major *must* study.

**Electives/Elective units:** An elective is a class which you can *choose* to study. Students must study all required classes and a certain number of electives of their choice.

In the US, you'll have a combination of required classes and electives. Required classes may be part of your major, or part of general requirements for a BA, for example. Even if you're an English major, for example, you'll still need to take a certain number of science classes.

In the UK, the different parts of your course are usually called modules. There will be compulsory modules and possibly also optional ones, which can also be called elective modules. Sometimes these can be taken in subjects which aren't part of your main discipline (e.g. in English language while you're studying mathematics).

Before you enroll, find out which parts of your major are required, which have pre-requisites, and which parts you can choose.

## **Student support services**

Most institutions have support services to help students find somewhere to live, handle problems (with health, finances, etc.), difficulty with studies, and so on. Some institutions will have services specifically for international students.

## **How your classes are taught**

The types of classes students attend abroad may be quite different from the classes you attended at home. Most international students are used to sitting in rows and listening while their professor/lecturer speaks. In English-speaking countries, these are called "lectures." You'll also be attending other types of classes where both the professor/lecturer and the students speak. You should be able to find out what sort of classes your major will be running from your college or university website or from the information they have sent you.

Below is a list of common types of classes.

**Lectures:** In lectures, the professor/lecturer speaks and students listen quietly and take notes. Your professor/lecturer may put up a podcast and/or PowerPoint slides online for students afterward. You may sometimes be given the slides or a reading list beforehand to prepare for the lecture.

**Discussion groups, Tutorials, or Seminars:** These are classes for small groups of students. Students are expected to ask

questions and discuss things with the professor/lecturer and other students.

**Workshops:** These are also classes for smaller groups. Workshops focus on practical activities, sometimes as a follow-up to a lecture.

**Online classes:** The professor/lecturer provides materials to read and links to websites and videos. There may also be an online “board” where students discuss things with the professor/lecturer and other students.

## **College/University culture**

Every university and college has a different flavor. Before you leave, find out as much as you can about the institution where you’ll be studying and the town or city where it is. How does it compare to your hometown and the schools you’ve attended there? Here are some questions to think about.

- **Location:** Is it a big city or a small town? Inland or on the coast? Close to home or a long flight away?
- **Classmates:** How many students per class? Will other students be mostly locals, or from other states, or other international students from other countries?
- **Activities:** What activities do you enjoy? Can you buy food you like, practice your religion, play favorite sports, and do other things you like?

## **Where to stay**

There are many kinds of places where you can stay while you’re studying. The main types of accommodation are explained below.

### **Campus accommodation:**

Many institutions have accommodation for students on campus. This is usually a bedroom with shared bathroom and possibly a kitchen. Sometimes the bedrooms have their

own bathrooms so you don't have to share. Sometimes you may have to share the bedroom with another person. You will not be expected to share a bedroom with a person of the opposite sex but you will find men and women living in the same campus accommodation.

Sometimes a building with lots of bedrooms (for one or two students) and a shared bathroom is called a dormitory or in the UK, a hall of residence. Meals can sometimes be provided too in which case there may not be kitchen facilities. Living in campus accommodation is convenient, and can be a great place to make friends.

### **Private student residences:**

In some cities there may be privately run dormitory accommodation for students. These residences often offer many of the services and advantages of campus-run accommodation, though they tend to be further from campus and more expensive.

### **Host families:**

Some students arrange to stay with a local family, who provides a bedroom and meals. If you decide to do this, make sure you talk to the family about their rules and expectations. Find out whether they expect you to eat most meals with them as a family, how flexible they are about when you come home, what tasks they expect you to do around the house, and so on.

### **Private rental:**

Many international students rent a house or apartment/flat to live in. This is usually done through a real estate or rental agency. You'll usually be asked to complete a rental application form. This form will ask you to prove you can pay the rent and provide the contact details of people who will confirm that you'll take care of their place (called referees). Remember that you'll be paying for utilities (electricity, water, gas, etc.) if you rent a place. You may also

need to pay for the Internet and arrange this through an Internet Service Provider (ISP). If you're studying in the UK and want to watch television, you may also have to pay for a TV licence. In some countries, like the US, you'll be required to pay one month's rent as a deposit as well.

- Real estate agencies near your institution list houses and apartments for lease every week. Visit them or their website for details.
- Most towns have at least one online search engine for finding places to lease. For the US, try [www.collegestudentapartments.com](http://www.collegestudentapartments.com). In Australia, you might like to try [www.realestate.com.au](http://www.realestate.com.au) or [www.domain.com.au](http://www.domain.com.au).
- Your institution may have an accommodation board or website where people with student-type housing advertise. Check with them.
- Check newspapers, public noticeboards, and kiosks: some people still advertise places for rent in these places.

If you want to rent, you need to look at what sort of places are available and how much they cost. You also need to decide where you want to live. Close to campus? Close to the center of town? How long are you prepared to spend traveling to get to classes? Do you want to be able to walk to classes? Is there convenient public transportation? If you plan to drive, is parking available and free or cheap?

- How much can you afford to spend on rent? Remember that you'll also need to pay for other things like utilities and the Internet. You may also need to pay to have these connected when you move in.
- How close to campus do you want to live? Don't assume you'll be able to find and afford somewhere within walking distance of your classes. Think about how much money and time you are happy to spend on travel.
- Do you want to live by yourself, or with other people?

- Living by yourself gives you privacy, but it's more expensive and can get lonely.
- Sharing with people you know (friends, relatives) can be a good option, though remember that good friends don't always make good roommates!
- It's also possible to share a place with new people. You can rent a place with more than one room and look for people to stay in the other bedrooms, or apply for a spare room in a place where people are already living.
- If you decide to share, remember you'll need to come to an arrangement with your roommate(s) about how to divide up the housework and the cost of rent and bills.
- Be careful: make sure you read all the information on your lease and know how much you have to pay at the start of the process. Many colleges/universities have a housing service or a student legal advice department which can help you with your contracts and can answer your queries. Don't sign anything before you know exactly what it all means.

## **When you first arrive**

- Give yourself time to rest after your flight, especially if it's a long one. Don't plan to do too much for the first couple of days. Make sure you know how to get to where you're staying from the airport when you arrive. Keep your first address details with you at all times so you know how to get back to where you're staying.
- If you plan to find somewhere to stay after you arrive, make sure you have temporary accommodation (a hotel, a friend's place) where you can stay for at least two weeks if necessary. Finding somewhere long-term to live may take longer than you think.

## Transportation

Even if you're living on or very close to campus, you'll probably want to travel around the town sometimes to go shopping, sightseeing, or have fun. How do you plan to travel in your new country? Here are some options to look at.

**On foot:** If you'll be living on campus and close to shopping and entertainment, you may be able to walk to most places. Make sure you wear comfortable shoes, especially if your campus is large! Some institutions can arrange for a security guard to go with you if you're nervous walking around the campus after dark, or you can call a saferide service (in many parts of the US). Be sure of safety issues around your campus before you walk around too much.

In the UK, the weather is very changeable, so take an umbrella with you even if it's not raining.

**Campus bus:** Institutions which have very large campuses or more than one campus may have free buses for students and staff to get around more easily.

**Bicycle:** Cycling is a cheap and effective way to travel short distances. Check the laws for cyclists in your new country: Do all cyclists have to wear helmets? Is it legal to cycle on the sidewalk/pavement? In the US, it's not illegal to cycle on the sidewalk, but it might annoy people who are walking. Bicycle lights and a bell may be a requirement; you may need to buy these separately. Make sure you buy a strong lock for your bicycle (not just a thin chain!); bicycles are often stolen on campus.

**Car:** If you plan to drive in your new country, bring your driver's license with you and research the laws for drivers from other countries. The traffic regulations may also be different from what you are used to—avoid fines by reading the highway code. Make sure you can afford to drive: buying or renting a car, paying for fuel, parking, and repairs and so on can be very expensive. If you plan to drive to classes,



check the cost and availability of parking on campus and near campus.

**Public transportation:** What public transportation is available around campus and where you plan to live? Check the fares and whether you can get a student concession or student discount. Do you need to pay beforehand, with prepaid cards or exact cash? This can differ from city to city. Check transportation timetables: international students sometimes find that buses and trains stop running earlier and run less often than they are used to. You may also find that buses are not as reliable, so allow extra time for traveling if you're not sure.

**Cab/Taxi:** Cabs/Taxis are generally quite expensive in English-speaking countries. In the US, unless you're in a big city such as New York or Chicago, you'll have to call a cab/taxi ahead of time. You should tip in the US—15–20 percent is the norm. In Australia and New Zealand, passengers often sit in the front next to the driver instead of in the back seat. In the UK, there are two types of cabs/taxis. You can hail a black cab on the street if their amber light is on, but private hire cars (“mini-cabs”) need to be booked before the trip on the phone or in person. It's not necessary to tip the driver but passengers often round the price up.