

# 19 Preparing to go home

The end of your study abroad experience can be as complicated as the beginning! This chapter will help you keep track of what you need to do and when.

## 1–3 months before you go home

### Travel preparations

- Book your flight home and make sure all your travel documents are ready for your flight home.
- Check your passport to make sure it's valid for at least six months. Most countries don't allow you into the country if your passport isn't valid for more than six months. If your passport isn't valid for more than six months, you'll need to get it renewed. This can be more difficult when you're abroad and you'll have to go to find the embassy of your country in your host country. These are usually only based in the capital city, or other major cities. Go online to find out more.
- Check your student visa to make sure it's valid until your flight home. If you plan to stay in your host country to travel or attend a graduation ceremony and your student visa runs out, you may need to get a tourist visa.
- Is your health insurance valid until the day you leave? Again, if you plan to stay longer, you may need to extend or change your insurance policy.

### Finances

Have you been working in your study country? If so, you need to file (lodge) a tax return. Find out what you need to do through the host country's tax office. This information

will be available online. If it's complicated, you may need to hire an accountant to help you file your tax return. Ask your friends or your institution's financial advisors for advice and recommendations. In the US, you'll have to file a special tax return for international students. Check out [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for information on all tax matters specific to international students. In the UK and Australia, annual earnings under a certain amount are tax free, but sometimes your employer has been deducting a higher amount of tax. In that case, you may be able to get a refund. Find out online where your local tax office is and ask them if you need to fill in a tax return.

- Check whether you can claim any other money when you leave. In some countries international visitors can claim refunds on some of the tax they paid (e.g. Australia has a Tourist Refund Scheme), or claim contributions they made to superannuation or retirement in their job.

### **Accommodation**

Let your landlord, host family, or student residence know when you plan to leave (“vacate”) their property. They may ask you to do this in writing.

- If you're renting privately, check the terms of your lease. You may need to “break your lease.” This means that you'll be moving out earlier than the end date on your lease agreement. Breaking your lease may involve some costs (e.g. continuing to pay rent until they find a new tenant). Check with your landlord or real estate agency. If you do need to break the lease in the US, you can usually find someone to sublet the apartment or house. This means that they would pay the remainder of the rent on the lease. Your town and or college/university will have places to look for subletters, and you can also look at [www.sublet.com](http://www.sublet.com) for subletters all over the world.
- If you're sharing a place with roommates/flatmates, tell them when you're leaving so they can look for someone else to take your room.

- Start thinking about what you want to do with pets, furniture, and anything else you won't be taking home.

### **Studies/Career**

You'll be arriving home with a new qualification. What does this mean for your career?

- Your institution will probably have career advisors. Make an appointment and tell your advisor which country you plan to work in. The advisor will help you think about what sort of jobs suit your interests, skills, and qualifications. He or she should also be able to advise you on how to find and apply for jobs. In the UK, international companies will often come in to talk to international students about their graduate schemes and other opportunities in their home countries.
- If you already have an employer, let them know when you'll be returning. Ask them about what has happened in the organization while you were studying abroad. Find out about any changes in management or other important events before you return.

## **2–4 weeks before you go home**

### **Travel preparations**

By now, you should have your flight home booked and all your travel documents in order.

- Check your health insurance. Do you have any last claims to submit? Submit them now. If you plan to arrive home before your policy expires, you may be owed a refund. Follow this up.
- A farewell party is a great way to let people know you're leaving and say your goodbyes. If you plan to have one, organize it now.

### **Accommodation**

Prepare to leave your rental property or residence. Make sure your room, apartment, or house is clean and undamaged. If

you rented an unfurnished property, you'll be expected to remove all furniture when you leave.

- **Property inspection:** Your landlord, real estate agent, or property manager will inspect your place after you return your key. If you paid a bond/deposit when you moved in, they'll return it to you if they're happy with the condition of the place. Any cleaning and repairs will be deducted from the bond/deposit.
- If you're renting privately, arrange to have your utilities (electricity, gas, water, land line) disconnected when you leave and pay any outstanding bills.
- If you're sharing with roommates/housemates, arrange with them how to pay your share of the rent and bills up to the day you leave. Remember that some of these bills may arrive after you have gone home.

### **What to do with your stuff**

Start packing. You may be surprised by how much stuff you've gathered in your time abroad! Decide what you want to take home with you and what you want to leave behind.

- Check your airline's rules about how much luggage you can take on the plane with you. Don't take more than this: excess luggage is very expensive.
- Check the import laws for your home country. Are any of the items you want to take home illegal or subject to import taxes?
- Look at shipping home heavy or bulky items you want to keep. Research companies that offer international freight. Get quotes from at least two or three different companies: the price for shipping can vary a lot. Insure valuable items before you have them shipped.
- Consider selling large items such as furniture, washing machines, and televisions. Your college/university may have a board or webpage where you can advertise your items. You can also advertise online through craigslist, eBay, Gumtree, Trade Me, and other websites.

- Give away unwanted items. Many charity organizations accept usable appliances, furniture, clothing, and other goods, and some will even pick up heavy items for you. Contact your local charities and ask them. You can give away items through websites like craigslist, Gumtree, and Freecycle, or arrange with your local council to take them away using their hard garbage/rubbish collection service. In North America, you could also have a garage or yard sale to make cash from your belongings. If you have friends who are also leaving, you could help each other with the set up and clean up at the end.

### **Studies**

- Check that you don't owe your institution any money (e.g. library fines, outstanding fees). You may not be allowed to graduate until these are paid.
- Register with your institution's alumni office, if they have one. This office provides past students with useful contacts and information. They'll provide advice about jobs that suit your interests, skills, and qualifications.

### **The last week**

- Arrange to have your mail redirected to your address in your home country. You can do this at your local post office. Note that you'll have to pay for this service.
- Return anything you may have borrowed (e.g. library books, household items, keys).
- Close your local bank account and order some cash in your home country's currency for when you return.
- Visit any favorite places and people for the last time and take photos to remember them by.
- Make sure you have contact details for everyone you want to stay in touch with.