

STUDY ABROAD HANDBOOK: TRAVEL RESOURCES

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TRAVEL DURING COVID

This section of the Handbook talks about the nuts-and-bolts of travel, but we want to start by saying that travel during a worldwide pandemic is not the same as travel during non-pandemic times. Every country is dealing with the pandemic differently. Travel restrictions and regulations can and do change overnight. Several possible travel disruption scenarios were listed in the “Compliance with Travel Restrictions” section of the COVID-19 Acknowledgement you signed in your BlugoldsAbroad account. We suggest you review the entire Acknowledgement again and keep it in mind as you read this section.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORT

- ✓ If you have not yet applied for a passport, **contact your UWEC study abroad coordinator immediately**. Passport processing is currently taking 8-11 weeks. Depending on when and where you plan to study abroad, it may not be possible to get a passport in time if you have not yet applied.
- ✓ If you DO have a passport, be sure that your passport is valid for **three to six months AFTER** the end of your program, depending on your host country’s requirements.

If you have a passport, or as soon as you receive it:

1. Sign it.
2. Scan the pages with your signature, picture & passport number, and **upload a copy to the Documents section in your BlugoldsAbroad account**.
3. **Make two photocopies** of those pages. Leave one at home with your family. Carry the second copy with you, separate from your passport, in case the original is lost or stolen.

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If you lose your passport abroad, **report the loss immediately** at the nearest U.S. consulate or embassy. They will assist you in replacing it. Local police authorities should also be notified.

VISA

A visa is official permission to visit a country granted by the government of that country.

Past criminal convictions may impact your ability to get a visa. Contact your UWEC study abroad coordinator with any concerns.

The CIE will provide basic immigration information, such as links to visa instructions and application forms, as part of your pre-departure preparation. This information is usually released 4-5 months prior to departure. **It is your responsibility to keep current on student visa requirements for your host country and, if required, to apply for and receive a visa from your host country's Consulate or Embassy.**

Visa issuance is at the discretion of the Consulate or Embassy. They can choose to issue the visa **ONLY** for the dates of study. They can refuse to issue a visa if your dates of study are shorter than the required time for a visa, even if you wish to extend your time with personal travel. They are free to deny any visa application without any explanation whatsoever. (The U.S. government reserves this same right with any foreign nationals requesting a U.S. visa.) In all interactions with Consulate or Embassy staff, it is important that you:

1. **Remain pleasant and polite**, whether via e-mail, on the phone, or in person.
2. **Remain calm and flexible** throughout the application process.
3. **Follow the instructions from your host institution if they differ from CIE information.**
Notify your UWEC study abroad coordinator because such updates are frequently sent only to students.
4. Prior to submitting your visa application, **check the website of the Consulate or Embassy of your host country for recent updates.**
5. **Become a Facebook or Twitter follower** of the Consulate/Embassy of your host country.
Many issue visa updates via social media.

Visas for personal travel: If you plan to travel to countries other than your host country, verify visa requirements by contacting the nearest Consulate, Embassy of that country or your travel agency. Many countries do not require U.S. citizens to obtain visas for tourist visits of less than three months, but you need to know before you go!

Visas for Non-U.S. Citizens: Obtaining a visa for non-U.S. citizens residing in the U.S. can be a lengthy process. Contact the Consulate of the country where you wish to study and follow their instructions. We encourage use of a visa processing company, if allowed. See additional information below.

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If you are an international student, contact UWEC International Student Services as well. They may have additional paperwork they need signed for your to return to study at UWEC.

VISA PROCESSING COMPANIES

The CIE provides basic visa information, but CIE staff cannot offer immigration advice or work with the Consulate/Embassy on your behalf. If you have unanswered questions about your visa application, and your host country allows it, consider using a visa processing company.

Visa processing companies charge a service fee in addition to the host-country visa fees. Service fees vary between companies, the type of visa (i.e. student vs. work), and whether you are pursuing regular or expedited service.

Below are the names and web addresses visa processing companies that have assisted past students. Please address questions directly to the companies.

- **CIBT (UW-System preferred provider)**
<https://www.wisconsin.edu/travel/planning/international/passport-services/> or call 1-800-577-2428.
Reference CIBT Account 32151 for reduced CIBT processing fees.
- **Perry International**
Web: www.perryvisa.com

PACKING TIPS

These are general suggestions. A country-specific packing list will be available in your BlugoldsAbroad account or Gateway portal (USAC programs) a few months prior to departure.

Rule #1: pack light. The week before you leave, pack everything you think you need and walk around the block. Difficult? You have packed too much. To become the ultimate light packer, visit the [one-bag Website](#).

Other ideas for to save space:

- roll your clothes
- put items inside of shoes (e.g. socks or underwear inside dress shoes in your suitcase)
- use space-saver bags
- put small items such as underwear in Ziploc bags (if security searches your bag, they will quickly be able to see what is inside without disrupting your whole packing plan.)

Rule #2: never pack essential documents or items (passport, immigration documents, medicine, anything you could not do without for a few days) in **checked luggage**. Have important documents and money in a money belt and allowable personal items in your carry-on: a toothbrush, contacts, eyeglasses, medications, and a change of clothes.

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Rule #3: There are many personal **items you cannot pack in your carry-on**. See the [Transportation Security Administration](#) for current information.

LUGGAGE

Airlines are strict about size of carry-on luggage. **Verify requirements, including weight and size limits, with your travel agent or the airline.** You are generally allowed one carry-on. Some airlines permit you to check one piece of luggage free on international flights, but this varies.

If you plan to travel a lot while abroad, past participants recommend a backpack. A suitcase with wheels or a collapsible luggage carrier can also be useful. It may be easier to carry two medium-sized suitcases than one large one.

Have luggage tags with the **address of your host site** on all bags. You'll find this in your UWEC Program-Specific Guide or USAC Arrival Guide. You do NOT want your home address on your luggage, as you do not want it sent back to the U.S.

All luggage should **lock for travel within the country**, but **do not lock it for the airport sections of your journey**. Backpack padlocks are available, or you may wish to purchase an external mesh covering, since it is difficult to lock every pocket.

CLOTHING

Take clothing that is machine-washable and does not wrinkle easily. Choose a color scheme and bring mix & match clothing for layering. Dark colors show dirt less quickly when you travel.

CONVERTERS AND ADAPTERS

Countries have different outlet and plug shapes. In some countries' standard voltage is 220 rather than the 110. Research your host country and other countries you plan to visit.

- If only the plug shapes are different, you will just need to purchase a **plug adapter** to use your appliances abroad.
- If both the plug shape and the voltage are different, you will need both an **adapter and a converter**.
- If you have several US appliances you plan to use abroad and are going to a country with standard 220 voltage, **consider bringing a power strip**, also. (You will still need to have a voltage converter and/or plug adapter in order to plug it into the wall.)
- Another option is to **buy needed appliances after you arrive**.

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- If you plan to bring your **laptop abroad**, **check the power cord to see acceptable voltage inputs and outputs**. If it includes 220 volts, you will only need to use a plug adapter, not a converter.

DO NOT BRING

Expensive cell phones, jewelry, or other luxury items may be targets for theft. If you decide to bring such items, consider personal property insurance for your time abroad.

SHOP ON ARRIVAL

Don't stress too much about forgetting something. The country you are going to has stores! 😊 You may not find the exact same product you use here, but you will find something similar.

PAST STUDENT TIPS: PACKING

- *"Bring half of what you really want to bring!"*
- *"Think practical, not fashionable. If your clothing is not comfortable, you won't be comfortable."*
- *"Comfortable walking shoes are essential."*
- *"Pack some basics: hangers, school supplies (notebooks, writing utensils, scissors, folders, flash drive, tape, post-its, calculator) and personal items. Then you can leave these things behind, making room for souvenirs."*

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

WHY USE A TRAVEL AGENT?

CIE study abroad staff expertise is in international education—a different field than international travel. Travel agents are trained in the ever-changing environment of travel rules and regulations, which have been changing even more often during COVID. They can help with question students often have questions about flights, such as:

- What is included at each level of ticket?
- What other costs am I not seeing (checked bags, etc)?
- Is this enough time to change planes/gates at this specific airport?
- What are the cancellation and change fees, and when do they apply?
- Can I purchase trip cancellation insurance? What does it cover?
- What are the COVID testing requirements for my airline/my destination?

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In addition, if you encounter travel delays and issues once your travel has begun, you will have a specific person you can contact for assistance. (Note that Expedia, Kayak, Travelocity, etc, are not travel agencies.)

MAKING TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

It is your responsibility to make flight arrangements to your host site through Travel, Inc., the UW-System mandated company*. Purchasing through Travel, Inc is UW-System policy. As such, you are strongly encouraged to use the service. Violating the policy is not grounds for cancellation. However, it may limit the ability of UW-System Travel to assist in the event of an air emergency.

You are responsible for all costs associated with this travel, including the original ticket, change and cancellation fees, travel/trip insurance, etc. **Specific instructions are in the “Getting Airfare Quotes” & “Booking Flights” sections below.**

*Students on the Harlaxton/England and many USAC specialty programs have group flight options. You can choose to either book on the group flight or to book through Travel Inc. See details in the “Harlaxton and USAC Group Flights” section below.

Do not purchase tickets until instructed to do so by the CIE.

GUIDELINES FOR MAKING A RESERVATION

Do not make flight reservations until:

- you have been instructed to do so by CIE
- you have been **officially accepted by your host site, and**
- **your host site has confirmed program dates and arrival/departure times.**

Arrive at the airport recommended by your host site. You may find less expensive flights to another airport, but by the time you figure in the logistics and costs of getting from that site to your host site, savings may be slight, and stress may be significantly higher.

Arrive ON THE OFFICIAL ARRIVAL DATE for your host site. Keep in mind:

- This often means leaving the US the day BEFORE the arrival day.
- It can be less expensive to fly on weekdays. However, if your program’s official arrival day is on a weekend, and you do not arrive on that day, you are responsible for all associated costs, such as getting from the airport to the host university (even if this cost is normally included) and hotel costs until program housing is available.
- For USAC programs, there is a \$250 charge for missing orientation.

Take the MOST DIRECT ROUTE possible. Different countries have different COVID requirements. You want to deal with as few different countries/airports as you can.

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Check the layover times! If you have an hour or less to change planes, *discuss with your travel agent* how likely it is you can make that next plane. When in doubt, take a longer layover.

Do NOT purchase a one-way ticket. It can currently be difficult to find tickets back to the U.S.

Buy a ticket with a LOW CANCELLATION FEE. To participate, you must maintain program eligibility requirements through the term prior to departure. Other unexpected circumstances may also force you to change your plans. *(A non-refundable ticket means just that--the airline or agency will not refund anything, no matter the reason, if you do not use the ticket.)*

Buy a ticket with a LOW CHANGE FEE. This is particularly important if your host university does not publish final exam dates until after the semester has begun, but again, other unanticipated events can require you to change your ticket. *(Even if you buy a changeable ticket, changing your return date is subject to seat availability.)*

Know what's included. Very inexpensive tickets may have large fees for baggage or for selecting a seat. They are often the last to board the plane, meaning less space for carry-on luggage. "Basic economy" tickets are not recommended: they usually do not include free luggage or an assigned seat, and they are usually non-changeable and non-refundable in case of cancellation.

You may wish to purchase travel or trip cancellation insurance when you buy your ticket in case your plans change unexpectedly. Discuss your options with your travel agent and know exactly what the policy covers. (For example, most policies specifically exclude travel disruption due to acts of war, and most also exclude pandemics.)

If possible, consider **traveling with another program participant.** A travel companion can make arrival in a new country much less intimidating!

ARRIVAL DATES AND TIMES

Carefully read the "Program Dates" section of the [UWEC study abroad website](#) for your program to learn where to find the information below:

- Your **travel dates.** If you are traveling before the official arrival date/leaving after the official departure date, you will be responsible for your own accommodations and other arrangements during that time.
- Your **arrival airport.**
- Whether there is a **specific time of day** by which you need to arrive at your arrival airport and/or depart at the end of the program.

USAC students: you will be able to see program dates, arrival times and other important information about booking flights in your USAC Gateway portal. **Again, do NOT purchase a flight until:**

- **instructed to do so by the CIE**
- **you receive your official acceptance email from USAC and**
- **you have reviewed the program dates and Flight Guide in your USAC Gateway portal.**

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GETTING AIRFARE QUOTES

To request quotes from Travel, Inc, click and fill out the [UWS Travel Registration Form](#). You only need to fill out the “Traveler/Attendee Information” and “Air Information” sections.

You will need the following information to complete the form:

- Your UWEC Group Code/Number: **UWEAU91420**
- Your travel information (See Arrival Dates & Times in the previous section), including
 - 1) the airport you intend to fly from (home airport)
 - 2) the airport you need to arrive at (destination airport)
 - 3) date & time of departure from home airport to destination
 - 4) date & time of return from destination to home airport
- In the “Air Special Instructions/Comments” box, we recommend stating that you do not want a “basic economy” fare, because you want a ticket that can be changed or cancelled if necessary

If you need assistance completing the form, **contact the UW-System Travel Inc consultants**. Include the Group Code UWEAU91420 in any communication:

Phone: 470-589-2205

Email: UWTravel@travelinc.com

Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. CST.

BOOKING FLIGHTS THROUGH TRAVEL, INC

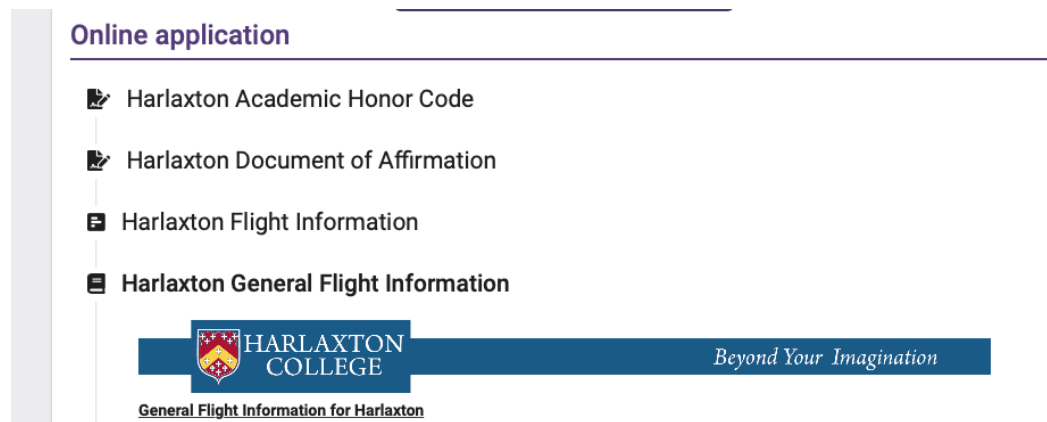
Once you have identified a flight with your Travel, Inc. consultant, you will need the following to book your flight:

- A credit card number to charge
- Your passport number and expiration date
If you are still waiting for your passport to arrive, you can book without the passport number; however, you will need to report it to Travel, Inc. before ticketing, because international tickets must be associated with a valid passport holder.
- There is an \$18 booking fee, and an additional \$18 fee for each change after booking

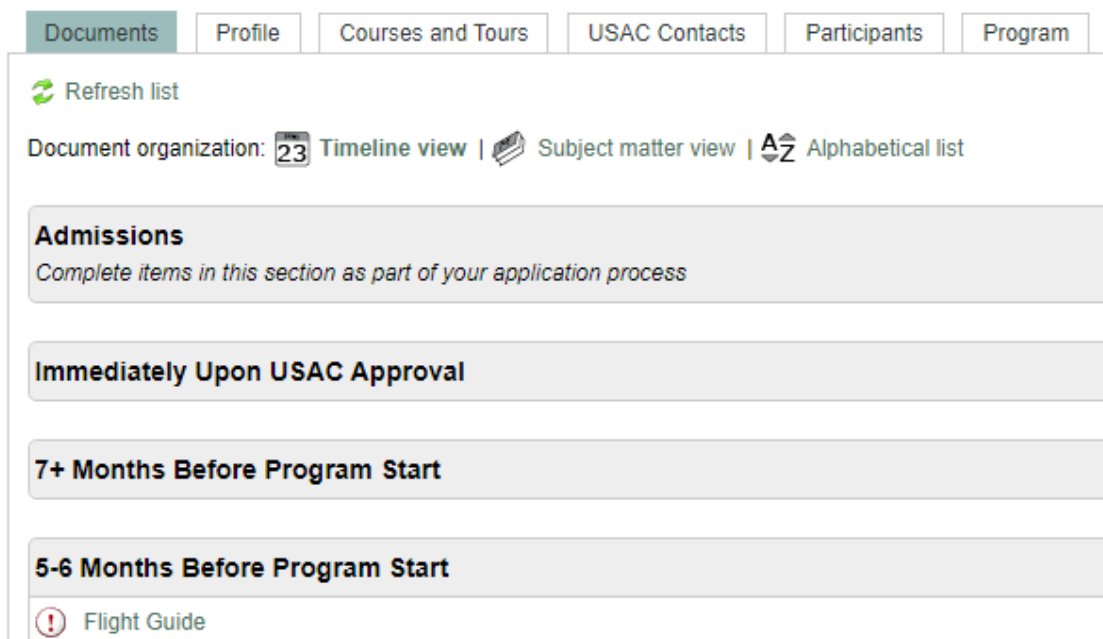
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HARLAXTON & USAC GROUP FLIGHT OPTIONS

Harlaxton students: you can find information about the Harlaxton group flight in the “Online Application” section of your Harlaxton account. Click on “Online Application” to expand the content. See screen shot below.



USAC students: follow the directions in the “Flight Guide” in your USAC Gateway account. If you are in “Timeline view”, it is usually in the “5-6 Months Before Program Start” section. Note that this document has been released later the last few terms, due to COVID-19. (Click on the heading to see the drop-down list of documents.)



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REPORTING YOUR FLIGHT ITINERARY

After you have purchased your flight, upload your complete flight itinerary sent from the airline and/or travel agent to your BlugoldsAbroad account. Directions can be found under the materials section for attaching documents to your account. Uploading your flight itinerary is a UW System requirement in case of an emergency.

ARRIVING ABROAD

IMMIGRATION

When you first arrive by air in a new country, you will go through the immigration process before you pick-up your checked luggage. Follow the signs (and the crowds) when you get off the plane. Once in the immigration area:

- **Join a line for non-citizens/visitors.** There are usually separate lines for citizens of that country or region (such as the European Union) and other lines for non-citizens/visitors
- **Put away your cell phone.** Calls and photos are not allowed in the immigration area. Therefore, **carry printed copies of your immigration documents!**

IMMIGRATION PROCESS

When you get to the front of the line, an immigration officer will review your required travel documents. This will always include your passport and may include other items if required by your host country, such as your visa, a passenger locator form (often completed online prior to travel), a declaration or disembarkation form (provided by flight attendants during flight), proof of COVID vaccination or test status, or other documents such as an acceptance letter from UWEC and your host university, or proof of funds to support yourself. **Only show the items you are specifically asked for.** Requirements for your country are in your program specific materials.

The officer may also ask you some questions. These often include:

- What is the purpose of your visit?
- How long are you staying?
- Where will you be staying?

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Some countries require photographs or fingerprints; the officer will take them, or you'll complete these at a kiosk, if needed.

Once you are approved, the officer will stamp your passport. The stamp may specify the length of time you are authorized to stay.

CUSTOMS FORMS

Customs officials are responsible for controlling material goods, animals, and hazardous materials entering the country. Customs laws and regulations are set by each country.

You will receive a Customs Declaration Form while on the airplane. Fill it out right away. Most forms ask for your departure city/country, arrival city/country, your flight number, and any restricted goods you are carrying. Restricted goods will usually be listed on the form.

If you have a connecting flight, and your luggage is checked through to your final destination, you usually collect your checked luggage at your final destination. However, you may need to complete a Customs Declaration for your carry-on luggage when you transfer planes.

Here is a [U.S. Customs form](#), as an example. (You will need to complete one of these when you return to the U.S. at the end of your time abroad.) Many international airports have information on their websites about going through immigration and customs. See a few examples below:

- [London Heathrow](#)
- [San Jose, Costa Rica](#)
- [Sydney Australia](#)

CUSTOMS PROCESS

Once you clear immigration, follow the signs to baggage claim and pick up your luggage. You must carry your own luggage through Customs.

After getting your luggage, join a Customs line. When you reach the front, give your Declaration Form to the official. They may inspect your luggage, or they may just wave you through.

LOST LUGGAGE

If your luggage does not arrive with you, contact any airport official in the baggage claim area. Fill out a *Lost Luggage Claim* with your address abroad and find out how to claim your bag once it arrives. You may be tempted to wait for your luggage to appear, but experienced travelers recommend that you do not. It is almost always a waste of time.

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Your [CISI insurance](#) and [CISI personal liability insurance](#) have benefits for baggage delay and lost baggage. See details at the links.

GETTING TO YOUR SITE

Your UWEC Program Guide or USAC Arrival Guide will have specific information on how you get from the nearest airport to your host site.

TRAVEL WHILE ABROAD

Many host sites usually offer some form of organized travel, whether required or optional. Details are in your UWEC Program Guide or on your USAC Gateway portal. These offerings may be affected by COVID restrictions in your host country, which can change at any time. Host organizations will adjust as possible, but such options cannot be guaranteed.

You may also wish to take advantage of your time abroad to do some personal travel. Again, whether you can travel outside of your host city, region or country will depend on the conditions of the pandemic and the COVID restrictions in place at any given time.

Although extra travel, understandably, is something that many study abroad students look forward to, it is not an essential element of successful study abroad. Students who stay in their host community and make connections there through volunteering, getting involved in student organizations, or doing things with their host families often have the richest experiences, ones that they can build on in the future.

GUIDEBOOKS

Travel guides such as *Let's Go*, *Rough Guides*, and *Lonely Planet* receive good comments from student travelers and are available at any major bookstore. Both the University library and the Eau Claire public library have several if you wish to compare before you buy. Here are some websites to get started:

www.lonelyplanet.com

www.travelchannel.com/

www.justmaps.org/

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DOWNLOADING MAPS

You can download sections of Google maps for offline use on your phone. Even in airplane mode, your phone's GPS will still work. This can be helpful in a new city; just be careful to check the map in a safe location. Do not walk around with your phone constantly out.

HOSTELS

Youth hostels are an economical alternative to hotels. Hostels have varying regulations and restrictions. Some impose curfews, some require that you have your own sheets, etc. Many require that you have an International Youth Hostel pass. For more information, check out Hostel International/AYH national office at www.hiusa.org.

Advice from a past student: *"When it came time to plan my travels, I set up the hostels first."*

"A tip for staying in a hostel--bring your own sheets. Sew two sheets together so they look like a sleeping bag. Attach a pocket to put a pillow in. This allows you to sleep in something clean."

RIDE-SHARING/HOME-SHARING SERVICES

Ride-sharing and home-sharing companies, such as Uber or AirBnB, are regulated differently in different countries, and sometimes even in different cities within countries. In some countries they are illegal; in some countries they are legal but unregulated. This is an ever-changing environment: **monitor the status and safety records of such companies in your host country and places you will be traveling to make an informed decision about whether to use them.**