



Updated December 8, 2021

## ***FAQ for SUNY Students & Families: What to Expect from a Study Abroad Experience in the Age of COVID-19***

### **PLANNING TO GO ABROAD**

#### **1. How can I best prepare to go abroad under the current circumstances?**

You must understand that during this uncertain time, you should be prepared to navigate ambiguity and changing guidelines independently. You and your family/emergency contact should consider many factors as you prepare to go abroad under the current circumstances, even as the COVID-19 situation improves. First and foremost, review the various scenarios described below, such as needing to quarantine, a COVID-19 outbreak, or contracting the virus, and develop your contingency plans. Consider finances in case of emergency, your health, the health of your family members, the healthcare system in your host country, the level of support on-site, your comfort level if you are unable to travel for a given period of time or told to shelter-in-place, your comfort level in navigating flight changes or border restrictions, etc. Your Study Abroad Office will be able to answer certain questions, assist in discussing various scenarios, and reviewing your risk tolerance. However, much of this decision will be about your personal preferences and comparing options for what is right for you.

#### **2. What should I do if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in my host country?**

You should remain informed on guidelines and proclamations set out by local and national governments in the location that you plan to study abroad.

#### **3. What will SUNY and/or my sending institution do in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19?**

In the case of an outbreak, SUNY and/or your sending institution<sup>1</sup> (working with study abroad partners) will provide as much guidance and information as it has available. You should maintain contingency plans in case your study abroad program does get cancelled (i.e. making plans for being on-campus the semester you are planning to go abroad).

#### **4. What will happen if my program is cancelled or if I choose to no longer participate in my program due to a COVID-19 related reason?**

If your program is cancelled, the sending institution will assist you in developing an academic plan to complete your coursework for the term abroad. Neither SUNY, your sending institution nor your home institution will refund any associated unrecoverable program costs (including travel) in the case of a cancellation. If you decide not to participate in your program due to COVID-19, you should contact your sending institution's Study Abroad Office and your academic

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<sup>1</sup> Your "sending institution" is defined as the SUNY campus whose program you are studying abroad through, which may not necessarily be your home campus

advisor immediately to arrange an alternate plan for the semester, such as registering for classes on your home campus (if possible).

*Note:* If your semester abroad begins later than your home campus, please be aware that it may be too late to register on your home campus. This may result in you taking a semester off. You are also subject to your sending and home institutions' withdrawal policies, as well as any refund/withdrawal policies for entities associated with your study abroad program (i.e. flight, housing, etc.).

#### **5. Can I make independent travel plans in advance?**

We discourage making any non-refundable independent travel plans. You should remain up to date with travel advisories (see resources below) and develop contingency options in the event that travel is made difficult or impossible due to COVID-19. SUNY does not monitor independent student travel and would not be able to assist you if your travels are disrupted or canceled due to COVID-19.

#### **6. Do I need to be vaccinated in order to study abroad?**

Yes. Additionally, countries and institutions abroad may require vaccinations and possibly booster shots. Documentation of your vaccination will be confirmed by your sending institution. While your sending institution's Study Abroad Office may be able to assist in determining host country and host institution requirements, it is ultimately your responsibility to have the correct documentation for travel and to follow vaccine guidelines for each of the countries you enter. If you are eligible for a booster shot prior to departure, it is recommended that you receive one.

## **WHILE ABROAD**

#### **7. What is expected of me while traveling abroad during the time of COVID-19?**

You are expected to do thorough research into your destination's travel and border restrictions, handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare situation, quarantine expectations and procedures, etc. As a student on a SUNY program, you are a representative of not only the SUNY system, but also of the U.S. or your home country as a whole. As such, you are required to follow all local laws and regulations. As a study abroad student, you are a guest in your host country, and thus should approach local laws, customs, and perceptions of COVID-19 with respect and a willingness to adapt, regardless of your personal feelings about the pandemic.

#### **8. What should I do if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in my host country?**

You should follow guidelines and proclamations set out by local and national governments in the location that you are staying, as well as guidance by the U.S. government, SUNY and/or your sending institution's Study Abroad Office. Host institutions/programs will also be the best resource for next steps, even though your sending institution's Study Abroad Office will be in communication with you. You should be prepared to shelter-in-place for an extended period of time if there is an outbreak.

#### **9. What will SUNY and/or my sending institution do in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19?**

Students participating in study abroad programs are assuming all risks associated with international travel. In the case of an outbreak, SUNY and/or my sending institution (working with study abroad partners) will provide as much guidance and information as it has available. In

the event that the guidance given by SUNY and/or your sending institution is to return home, you will be responsible for arranging your own return transportation. If the host institution/program provides an online option for completion of coursework, you will be expected to complete those courses online. In the event that coursework cannot be completed remotely, SUNY and/or your sending institution's Study Abroad Office will work with you to identify the options for completion of academic requirements.

**10. What should I do if my host university/program switches from in-person or hybrid classes to all remote learning due to an outbreak?**

If you are already in the host country, you should continue to take and complete your courses online. If you choose to return to your home country to complete the courses online, that is your decision and at your expense.

**11. What should I do if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in a location in which I am temporarily traveling?**

We recommend limiting extensive travel outside of your host country due to the possibility of border closures. If you have not begun travel, you should remain in your host country and avoid travel to locations with significant outbreaks. If you are currently traveling in a location with an outbreak, you should monitor local and regional guidelines for returning to your host country. Upon your return, you should follow isolation and/or quarantine instructions from your host country and communicate with your host institution/program/faculty leader about participating in coursework remotely.

**12. What should I do if I contract COVID-19 while abroad?**

Please notify your sending institution's Study Abroad Office. The SUNY Study Abroad Insurance Policy through [United HealthCare](#) covers most medical expenses and hospital care while abroad. Please make sure to review the coverage details under your United HealthCare policy.

It is important to familiarize yourself with the local healthcare system and to know where to go in case you do get sick. Understand that it may not be possible for loved ones to visit/assist from abroad, depending on travel restrictions at the time. Additionally, you should be prepared for quarantining per the local country's guidelines (if requirement in place, typically 10-14 days) if you receive a positive COVID-19 test, whether or not you are symptomatic.

**13. I am worried about the impact of quarantine/isolation or COVID-19 in general on my mental health while I am abroad. What mental health resources are available to me?**

Please alert your sending institution of your concerns. Each study abroad program is going to have different resources available to you. Your SUNY program advisor can also assist you in reaching out to United HealthCare (including telehealth) to understand what mental health related costs will and won't be covered while you are abroad. You may also have access to counseling services at your home campus. Please consult the student health center/office at your home campus.

## **COVID-19 RESOURCES**

**How can I monitor updates and travel warnings related to COVID-19?**

You can follow U.S. government updates on travel safety by using the [Department of State](#) and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) resources, which are assessed every 28 days. You should also check [U.S. Embassy websites](#) for your destination, as these sites may have more information specific to your program destination.

- Information for how risk is assessed is available on the [DoS](#) and [CDC](#) websites.
- Other important resources for risk analysis and different perspectives:
  - [OSAC Crime & Safety reports](#)
  - Foreign government COVID-19 resources: [British](#), [Australian](#), [Canadian](#), etc.
  - [World Health Organization](#)
  - [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)
  - [European Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
  - Local health department guidelines
  - Private sector organization resources: airlines, travel agencies, etc.
  - Check your email from your SUNY administering campus and your host institution/program daily in case there are any updates.
- Information regarding host country restrictions and requirements for entry and departure (can typically be found on that country's U.S. Embassy page).
- Information about [COVID-19 Vaccines](#).