

Preparing to Travel Abroad for GTE

1. Passports – Applications are available online, and can be turned in at many locations in the Metroplex, or by mail. See <http://travel.state.gov/passport/> for details. Allow for at least 6 weeks or longer. Expedited service is available for an additional fee, and applications must be presented in person at the INS office in Houston. You MUST provide all the documentation required, and exactly the documentation required or your passport application will be delayed. Do not even think about waiting to apply. Do it NOW. *You will absolutely require a passport*, even for travel to Mexico. If you already have a passport check its current expiration date. You WILL NOT be allowed into Jordan, Israel, or Thailand if your current passport expires within 6 months of your entry date. If you must renew your passport; do it NOW.
2. Visas - http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1229.html#t has information for all countries.
3. U.S. Govt - Registration with US Embassies abroad and US Govt. Alerts: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration_4789.html
4. Immunizations - <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/vaccinations.aspx>
5. Non-U.S. Passport holders. You may need to apply for visas in advance of your visit. You may be restricted from entering and leaving the U.S. with your current student visa. U.S. Permanent Residence and/or marriage to a U.S. citizen DO NOT insure that you can re-enter the U.S. after leaving. Please inform the GTE office if you plan to enroll in one of the immersion trips and you are traveling on a non U.S. Passport.
6. Getting cash: The most cost efficient way to get local currency is to use the debit card from your U.S. bank in local ATM machines. U.S. credit cards may also be used in local ATM's, but there is often a fee per transaction and finance charges accrue immediately. It is useful to bring up to \$100.00 in U.S. currency. Make sure you know the PIN for your debit or credit card. Local banks will not recognize U.S. debit cards and may charge high fees if you wish to get cash with your credit card. Local banks are also unlikely to be particularly efficient, and will have restricted hours. Traveler's checks are not necessary, but if you bring them make sure they are in small denominations (\$20.00). Many merchants simply cannot change large amounts of money.
7. Buying souvenirs and gifts:
 - a. Our local contact people can advise you about reasonable prices. Remember that in the countries we visit bargaining is normal practice. Normally offering half the stated price is a good place to begin. Remember that bargaining is a social activity, a way that people get to know each other, a way for the merchant to inform the customer of the superiority of the goods, and a form of entertainment. Don't rush or be rushed. Remember that a bargain is when you pay less than what it is worth to you – regardless of how much profit the merchant makes.
 - b. Not everything for sale outside the U.S. is allowed inside the U.S. In particular fresh foods, items made from parts of endangered species, drugs and herbal medicines, and most weapons are not allowed. You can check the U.S. Customs website for specific restrictions. <http://www.customs.ustreas.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/>
 - c. Be certain that you know the exchange rate. It is useful to make a note card with exchange rate conversions for a range of amounts. <http://www.xe.com/ucc/> has current exchange rates and conversions.

- d. Remember that we are traveling extensively with our luggage. Do not buy more than you can personally carry. Some merchants will ship things for a fee.
8. **Physical Fitness:** Both of our immersions will involve some walking, sometimes in warm weather. If you cannot walk a distance of 2 to 3 miles in a day you should consider a program of exercise to prepare for the immersion. If you have special physical needs inform the GTE director immediately so that we can determine whether these can be met. Please be aware that outside the U.S. there is no assurance of handicapped access to public buildings.
9. **Food and Drink:** All the food and drink provided as part of the immersion experience will be safe and healthy. You should try it all but of course you may not like it all. Apart from meals provided by our immersion hosts you should eat only cooked food, raw fruit which can be peeled, preserved or dried fruits (which you should rinse off), or packaged snacks. Drink only bottled drinks and bottled water, or boiled drinks such as coffee and tea. If you are a vegetarian, or have other special food needs, you **MUST** inform the GTE director upon application. Special food needs cannot be accommodated on all immersions.
10. **Stimulants:** The American dependence on caffeinated coffee is not universally shared, and not all coffee is equal in that regard. Conversely you cannot assume that decaffeinated coffee will be available.
 - a. If you are an early riser who simply must have a cup of coffee in the morning you might consider bringing some instant coffee and a portable water heater, as well as an appropriate cup. If you simply must have a cup of decaf in the evening you had better bring it along. Coffee is usually served and paid for by the cup outside the U.S. There is no universal standard for how it will be served. Learned to be flexible about milk and sugar.
 - b. The use and availability of alcoholic beverages varies widely by culture. In the company of Muslims or Buddhists you should not order or consume alcohol unless they specifically offer beer or wine for you as a gesture of hospitality. You should always feel free to refuse alcoholic beverages. Moderation is the watchword in other cases.
11. **Personal Hygiene:** It is a good idea to wash your hands before eating – always. A small container of water-free disinfecting hand soap, or “handy-wipes” will be useful. You may wish to bring a roll of toilette paper or tissues, but do not go overboard. These things will be provided or are locally available. In Bethlehem and Israel the desert climate requires particular attention to disposal of paper products. Make sure you read the information in your room. It is wise to bring a small, light, bath towel and a wash cloth.
12. **Health:**
 - a. If you have any health condition that requires medication or regular treatment you **MUST** bring everything you need with you, and you must inform the GTE director.
 - b. If you might possibly need decongestants, antihistamines, anti-inflammatory drugs (aspirin, IB-profen), analgesics (Tylenol), steroids (hydrocortisone), or any other non-prescription drug you should bring these as well. You should assume that they will not be available, or will be available only by prescription, or will be very expensive.
 - c. Bear in mind that if you must see a doctor you will be sent to one who has excellent qualifications. However, standards of practice and treatment do vary according to the culture. Open mindedness, flexibility, and trust will be crucial. All participants in GTE programs are required to carry international health insurance through AIG. This will be purchased on their behalf at the time of registration.

- d. You must have a valid vaccination for: Tetanus-diphtheria, Vaccinations for typhoid, hepatitis (A and B), yellow fever, cholera, and polio may be necessary depending on the area you are visiting.
- e. Mosquito borne malaria and dengue fever are found in some parts of the world. However, anti-malarial prophylactics are *not* necessary for travel in the places we will visit. The best prevention for dengue fever is to avoid exposure to mosquitoes. It is highly advisable to bring loose long sleeve shirts/blouses, long loose trousers, socks, and a hat or scarf for early morning and evening wear when the mosquitoes are most prevalent, as well as for sleeping. Mosquito repellants containing DEET are also effective. You may be provided with “vape” type mosquito repellant devices. These release repellant from small paper tablets through heat, and are generally effective and safe. It may be useful to use a ceiling fan, even in air conditioned rooms. Non-DEET insect repellants have no proven value against mosquitos.

13. Clothing:

- a. Tropical Countries – Clothing should be cool and comfortable, easy to wash and dry. Seminary students generally dress in a way appropriate to their professional aspirations and the requirements of modesty while on campus. You should plan on wearing modest skirts and blouses (women) or light weight slacks and short sleeved dress shirts (men). Dark colored slacks and skirts are less likely to show dirt and mud. Keeping white and light colored fabrics clean in a rainy environment is hard if you are traveling. Reserve shorts and t-shirts for when you are a tourist. Christians dress nicely for worship and some of the clothing commonly worn here at Perkins for both classes and worship would not be appropriate.
- b. Temperate Climates – You may be in weather below freezing for several days in a row or more. You may also find that buildings are not kept as warm as you are used to. It is advisable to bring clothes that can be worn in layers, and a light waterproof coat as an outer layer may be very useful. You should bring a small umbrella. Remember that adult Europeans often dress better in public than is the norm in the United States.
- c. Work Clothes – If your immersion involves some degree of work, such as is found in Taize, then be certain to bring at least one pair of trousers and shirt that can get grubby.
- d. Below the equator – Remember that in the southern hemisphere it is cold during our summer and hot during our winter. Please check the weather online for the place you are visiting to get an idea what clothes to pack.

14. Luggage: Each person should bring no more than he or she can personally carry. Generally this means that you should restrict yourself to one suitcase (definitely on rollers) and one carry-on (preferably a backpack that can be used as a day pack.) Detailed packing lists will be provided at the Pre-immersion Orientation on November 21st.

15. Electrical Appliances:

- a. Outside the U.S. 220 volts is the norm. You will need plug adapters for the countries you plan to visit. Malaysia-Singapore uses both British type plugs in two or three varieties (three large flat pins, three large round pins, two pins) Germany uses northern European style plugs (two round pins, sometimes protruding from a round base that has strips of metal for the ground.)

- b. You will need to make sure that your electrical apparatus work with 220 volts. Many if not most computer, phone, and digital camera chargers are dual voltage. Check before you by a transformer to convert 220v to 110v. .
16. Security: There are no particular security precautions necessary, apart from those you should consider whenever traveling abroad.
 - a. Do NOT carry all your cash, credit cards, passport, and other papers in one place. It is advisable to keep your passport, some cash, credit / debit cards on your person at all times. You should keep a copy of the front pages of your passport, some cash, and a credit / debit card in your luggage, perhaps under the lining. Also leave photocopies of passport pages with a relative in the U.S. who can be easily contacted.
 - b. You should carry your passport / cards / cash where you can see them. NOT in a backpack you are wearing and NOT in a purse slung over your shoulder behind your back and NOT all in a wallet in your rear pocket.
 - c. You should always stay with the group. You will be told when groups of two or three may venture out on their own. NEVER alone.
 - d. Being unfriendly to strangers doesn't make you more secure, but neither should you befriend or follow them.
17. Cell Phones: Some U.S. cell phones can be used in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. These are normally Tri-band GSM phones. T-Mobile and AT&T have such phones. If you have such a phone you can ask that its overseas capabilities be switched on. Be aware that either placing or receiving calls outside the U.S. is very expensive – usually from \$1.00 to \$8.00 a minute.
18. Phone Cards: Phone cards with heavily discounted rates for overseas calls are widely available in the countries we visit. If you have access to a phone (payphone or hotel phone, or even a cell phone, this is the best way to keep in touch.) Do not count on being in regular telephone contact with anyone. Group leaders will have cell phones for emergencies.
19. Fax and Email: Our hosts will have limited fax and email capabilities available. You should plan to be out of touch and focused on the immersion experience while you are outside the U.S. If you must absolutely use your own laptop and have dial-up email contact then you must make all arrangements for plug adapters, international dial-up numbers, and you must find a phone.
20. Language: Unless you know the local language you'll have to try English. But there are ways of overcoming language deficiencies.
 - a. Try universal brand names when you need to buy something. "Duracell" or "Eveready" means battery in almost every language. Same with "Coke."
 - b. Pointing politely works. Just remember never to point at a person – something which is offensive in many cultures. Avoiding pointing with your forefinger. Use your entire hand (palm down) or thumb.
 - c. A little bit of charades is both entertaining and effective. Try acting out washing hair for shampoo, etc.
 - d. Certain words are so modern and rooted in a single language that they are universal, or people generally know the English word. So don't be afraid to try. Don't be ashamed to fail.

- e. Learn to say “please” and “thank you” in the local language – that will carry you a long way.
 - f. Speaking English louder and slower doesn’t help, (unless they ask) and is annoying..
21. Where am I? It is worthwhile to buy or download a map of the area in which you will be traveling and keep it with you. This will help keep you oriented.
 22. Photography: Photographing people who you do not know may be problematic, although photographing persons in a crowd, or in a tourist area, is not objectionable. If you want to photograph an individual ask permission first. In the countries we will visit government buildings, border crossings, police stations, military facilities (vehicles and personnel also), as well as important components of the infrastructure such as electrical power generators, and telephone exchanges, should NOT be photographed.
 23. Further Information: Try the embassy of the nation you are visiting online, or the U.S. state department, which also has links to useful information.