



***Study Abroad Student Handbook
for Independent and Group Travel***

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NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE
INTERNATIONAL

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Study Abroad Student Handbook for Independent and Group Travel

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Introduction

Taking learning to another country, with its differences in geography, language and ways of knowing, is a valued and sought after opportunity - one which opens doors to seeing the world in new ways. Travel is an adventure and one which asks the adventurer to be open to new experiences, to suspend judgment and look at circumstances in new ways. In another study abroad preparation handbook, I read this comment attributed to Mark Twain, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness." I would concur. The more I travel, the more I take the chance to look at the world from difference perspectives, the less I know that the way I see the world is "right". And the more I want to understand how others see the world.

You are likely reading this because you are considering travelling to study or have already made application to participate in an exchange, field school or practicum away from North Island College. It's a big step to even consider the decision, let alone act upon it. There are lots of challenges to travelling and trying to complete academic learning away from campus. The rewards, at least in my books, far outweigh the challenges. So I extend to you my good wishes as you walk this path. My single piece of advice is PREPARE! The more you know about your destination/s and the travel realities the deeper your experience. Talk to others who have travelled, read everything you can find, watch movies, follow the news, and make connections before you leave. And use this handbook and the appendixes to help you through the readiness to travel.

My thanks to my colleagues at VIU and Camosun for sharing materials and for their support as I prepared this handbook. We are privileged to work in such a collaborative environment.

One last thought before you dive in to this handbook. It is the rare person who comes home from a study abroad who is not changed as a result of the experience. You will see, do and think things new to you. People you meet randomly or purposefully will open your mind and your heart to seeing the world in new ways. Expect change. Embrace difference. Enjoy the adventure.

North Island College International's role in your study abroad is to provide you with the information and support you need to have the best learning experience possible. Count on us to support you, let us know how we can help!

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Travel Safety

Rule one for travelers – keep safe. That does not mean don't take any risks. If you did that, you would not be leaving the Island. Keep safe means thinking about what you are going to be doing, having the appropriate clothes or tools, weighing the possibilities for injury or getting lost, exploring ways to mitigate risk, planning ahead, going in groups, being fully engaged in the present, following the laws of the land, sharing information with fellow travelers, thinking twice when your gut tells you this might be risking, saying no to some opportunities. In short, it means being thoughtful about what you are considering doing and being mindful while you are doing it.

Risk Assessment

Smart travelers do lots of research about where they are travelling to insure they are aware of the potential risks they might encounter. You are advised to consider where you are planning to travel and read about the potential risks involved. Here are some key resources to review

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAIT) provides **country information** for Canadian travelling abroad. This site contains information on each country's culture, history, geography, economy, government, and current political situation.

Check **travel warnings** which recommend Canadian citizens defer travel to a country because of dangerous conditions. The public announcements section of this page provides fast-breaking information about relatively short-term conditions that may pose risks to the security of travelers. North Island College considers any travel at risk if the coding on the DFAIT website is posted at Avoid non essential travel and Avoid all travel. Postings at Exercise a high degree of caution causes the College to ensure the supervising department has taken all appropriate measure to ensure your safety.

Other useful sites to explore for travel safety information include

[Health Canada](#) contains current information on health, inoculations, and health notices for conditions in countries throughout the world.

[Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) provides information from the British perspective on world news, travel information and cautions.

[The World Factbook](#) provides information on the history, people, government, economy, geography, communications, transportation, military, and transnational issues for 266 world entities

[Air Security Hot Spots](#) provide up to date information on various situations throughout the world, including important reminders of anniversary dates which may indicate an increased risk.

Personal Safety

As you prepare for your travels outside of Canada you should think about your personal safety. As you would in many areas here in Canada, you should continue to use care and caution while travelling abroad.

Remember, ignorance is not an excuse! Students participating in a study abroad program are expected to be familiar with and follow the laws of the host country as well as other countries the student may be visiting. Failure to do so could have very serious legal implications including possible p r i s o n s e n t e n c e s . Students being charged with an offence should contact the Canadian Embassy immediately; however, they should not expect any benefits from the Canadian government if they have broken a local national law.

You may want to explore the types of [consular services](#) available from the Canadian government.

Harassment

While NIC attempts to ensure its students are not placed or travelling where racism and homophobia are evident or rife, we do recognize that in some cultures and some countries one or all of the above may be an issue. Prepare for your travels by thoroughly your host country and region. Once away, if you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation involving some form of harassment, please contact the international office of your host institution and/or contact NICI for possible guidance and assistance

Tips for travelling safely

1. Before you head off, familiarize yourself with any trouble spots and/or potential conflicts in the countries you plan to visit, and be aware of current events while you are away. Visit the Department of Foreign Affairs website
2. Protect your valuables from pickpockets by remaining alert and cautious. Conceal your valuables in a money belt or neck-safe under your clothing while traveling. Leave your passport and airline ticket in a hotel safe (at reception or in your room) and carry a copy of these with you when you are out for the day.
3. Don't carry large amounts of cash. Use bank machines, during the day, in highly visible places to get smaller amounts of cash. Change small amounts of traveler cheques at a bank or respected money changer.
4. Do not leave your luggage unattended at any time. Do not agree to carry or check any luggage or other items for anyone.
5. If you are looking for a taxi, 'official' taxi stops are generally located outside airports, train and bus stations. If you find a good driver, get his or her car so you can call next time you need a taxi.
6. Do not impair your judgment by consuming excessive amounts of alcohol or by using drugs.
7. Avoid traveling or going out alone.
8. Do not walk alone at night or in remote and unfamiliar places. Stay near busy and well-lit areas
9. Avoid demonstrations. What appears to be a peaceful demonstration can suddenly change into a dangerous situation and you can become caught up in an unwanted situation
10. If you travel alone while in country, leave your travel itinerary, where you are going and when you expect to return, with the international office of the host College and with a friend in country. Keep your family pack home aware of your travel plans.
11. If your Self Assessment identified any issues of concern, ensure you have planned for them

Eyes Open

Final word of advice – keep your eyes open. Use your cultural intelligence to anticipate problems and then avoid them!

Travel Preparation

Set your goals

International travel and studying in a different culture are amazing privileges and increasingly an important part of education. Now that you have made the decision to study away from home; to explore different ways of knowing and being, it's time to set some goals. Take a few minutes and think about why you are doing this? What do you want to get out of it? What do you want to learn? Or see? Or do? while you are away. Can you imagine how you might be different upon your return?

It's a great time now to set up your travel journal - electronically or buy a small paper journal (remember to buy something that is light. I find MOLESKIN books really useful because they are light, have a pocket to keep bits of paper and an elastic that keeps them closed). Jot down your goals in your journal as a way to open the door to this new adventure. Revisit your goals as you prepare for your study abroad and feel free to modify them as you learn more. That is the beginning of the changes coming!

Master to do list

Of course you should set up your own to do list – and maybe even several lists; packing, money, school, travel planning. The following are some key items you will want to consider.

Approximately four months prior to departure

- Your passport must be valid for 6 months after your return date. Confirm this or apply for a passport
- Book your flights only if NICInternational is not making the arrangements. Cancellation and medical insurance will be included in any arrangements made by NICI. If you are booking independently check with the requirements of your exchange program with regard to cancellation insurance as this is best done at the time of booking.
- If you are participating in an exchange program, discuss with your faculty advisor your course load while away and upon your return. You might want to consider your graduation timeline as well as any unique learning opportunities available while you are away
- Begin your research into your host country
- Monitor any travel advisories for your host country on Voyages Canada

Approximately two months prior to departure

- Complete your NICI required documentation as noted on the Study Abroad website in the Before you go section.
- Purchase travel insurance if you do not already have it.
- Meeting with your doctor and update any prescriptions purchasing the amount you will need for your full time away.
- Attend the travel clinic arranged by NICI for group travel or book an appointment with the Travel Clinic (CX 250 331 8571) for health advice and vaccines required or recommended. All students travelling are expected to attend a travel clinic
- Apply for any visas you will need to enter your host country and other countries you are planning to travel in. For students on exchange contact your host institution for assistance with documentation and process.
- Read travel guides for the countries in which you will be travelling. Consider purchasing (new or second hand) a Lonely Planet, Rough Guide or Let's Go for your destinations. The investment is worth it.
- Arrange with NISU to get your International Student Identity Card. It will be useful in getting discounts while you are travelling.

Approximately one month prior to departure

- Attend appropriate pre-departure orientations, either as part of the field school or as provided by NICI.
- Arrange any in country travel that allows for discounts if purchased prior to arrival (e.g. Japan Rail passes can only be purchased outside Japan)
- Follow the checklist in Money Matters – especially be sure you have at least one credit card, 4 digit PIN, have notified your credit card company when and where you will be travelling and have arranged for someone to be a contact if you need assistance with financial matters
- Make your own packing list and do a first run through (see Packing)

One week prior to departure

- Check in with NICI to ensure everything is in order. For students travelling independently receive a copy of your Emergency Protocol sheet.
- Confirm your airline and arrival arrangements
- Check in with Voyages Canada – anything new?

Academic matters

You are encouraged to be sure you have discussed your study abroad with your academic advisor prior to finalizing your study plans. Questions to consider include

- What is the impact to my graduation timeline?
- Will studying abroad impact my receiving credit for the courses I am taking?
Do I need approval from the department chair?
- For exchange students, are the courses I am taking transferable back to NIC?

Check out Appendix 1: Exchange Students for some issues to consider as an exchange student.

Documents relevant to your travel

Airline Tickets

For students participating in group field schools and practica, travel arrangements to and from your host country will be made for you. All others must make their own travel arrangements. NICI is pleased to assist with advice related to travel abroad and, if asked, we will put you in contact with travel agencies who have served NIC well in the past.

Passport

Travel outside Canada requires a passport. Generally, your passport should be valid for at least 6 months beyond your return date. The closest passport office is in Victoria: 747 Fort Street.

Alternately visit the [Canada passport website](#)

Complete the form and mail it with two passport photos and an official birth certificate. Current cost for application for a Canadian Passport is available online.

Class Registration

Your academic advisor will work with you to determine which classes to enroll in at the host institution and what the equivalencies are for NIC. In many instances, this is a preliminary process since you may need to register at your host to finalize your program of study. While abroad, you may need to make arrangements to register in classes for the semester after you return.

International Student Identification Card (ISIC)

This card lets you receive discounts for travel on many airlines and ground transportation, as well as cultural sites. Contact NISU to get your card.

Medical Insurance

You must have medical insurance that will cover you while you study abroad. If you are travelling in a group NISU will arrange your medical travel insurance. If you are travelling independently it is your responsibility to purchase medical travel insurance and provide a copy of your policy to NISU. Your travel agent or local insurance agencies can provide you with adequate coverage. Take the time to review your policy and the processes you are required to follow should you need medical services while you are outside Canada. Remember to carry a wallet size ID card for verification of your insurance.

Travel Cancellation and Household Insurance

For those travelling in a group you are required to purchase cancellation insurance on your flights. Those of you travelling independently may wish to consider trip cancellation insurance. You may also wish to consider liability insurance on accompanying household and personal effects. Rates may vary depending on your length of time away. Find out if your personal items are covered by your (or your parents') homeowner's policy while you are away.

Canadian Customs Certificates

These certificates are for personal valuables accompanying you abroad. You may want to consider these and should be aware they must be completed and returned to Canada Customs before you leave, as proof of prior ownership when you return. You can register your camera, computer, jewelery and other valuables before you leave so that you will not be required to pay duty on these when you return to Canada.

Copies of your documents

It is a good idea to make copies of valuable documents and to leave them in the safekeeping of friends or family. Documents that should be copied include your Birth Certificate, your Passport, travelers' cheques and college transcripts. It is also a good idea to carry several extra passport-sized photos with you, for visas or for other identification purposes while you are away. Having a copy of these documents on a portable external drive you carry with you is also wise.

Wills

It may happen. In consideration of family members, ensure that your will is in good order. In the event of a tragedy, the Canadian embassy will contact your family and help to make the required arrangements.

Acknowledgement of Responsibility and Assumption of Risk (Liability waiver)

This form is required before you depart. It is available on the NICI Study Abroad site under [Forms](#)

Country Visa

Visas are special permissions to visit a country and are issued by the host country. Not all countries require a visa for Canadian citizens. Those that do have differing regulations for acquiring the visa (e.g. purchase upon arrival, attend a meeting at the local embassy, send your passport and application to the country embassy in Canada). In some countries, if you are planning to stay for more than a specified period in a country, you will be required to acquire the appropriate visa. Check [Voyages Canada](#) website to explore the visa requirements for the country/s you will visit.

Health concerns

If you have ever studied [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#), you will know that what I mean when I say that a lot of the times when you travel you end up functioning near the bottom of the hierarchy. Your concerns a lot of the time are –Where will I sleep tonight? Where will I eat? And what will I eat? And probably Am I safe? How to I not get sick?

And it's the How do I not get sick question I want to address now. Although not nearly as fun as planning what sites you will see or who you might meet, it's important to consider what you can do to keep stay healthy and what to do if you get sick. A couple of hours of research before you go will stand you in good stead while you are away. More than once in my own travels I was really glad I had packed my own personal med kit and that I understood the medical coverage I had.

There is a worksheet in Appendix 6 called Medical Matters. It's worth a quick review to ensure you have considered the issues.

Here are my top five tips health tips

Visit our local travel clinic for health travel advice and to determine which vaccines you would be advised or required to have at least a month prior to departure. NICI on occasion, in consultation with the dean of your division, may require you to have a vaccine but generally this decision is yours in consultation with the travel nurse. Use this link to research your [travel health](#) questions. A list of [travel clinics](#) is available on the web at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/yf-fj/clinic-clinique/bc-cb-eng>.

Be aware of the health risks of travel and plan for them. Ignorance is not bliss when you are hanging out by the toilet when everyone else is out exploring. For information about health issues when travelling abroad visit the [Canadian government website](#) on Travel Health.

Take your prescriptions with you.

- Pack an extra supply of your medication in case you are away for longer than expected
- Carry a copy of the original prescription, and ensure that both the generic and trade names of the drug are included in case your medication is lost or stolen (a doctor's note describing why you are taking the medication is also recommended)
- If you are taking a less common medication, check to ensure that it is readily available in the country you intend to visit
- Your medications should be packed in the original, labeled container to avoid problems with customs officials. Do not try to save luggage space by combining medications into a single container.

Take your own med kit. Make a list that works for you and take what you think you will need for the time you are away (store extra at home to keep your luggage weight down). Appendix 8 provides a sample list. Take meds in store packaging – avoid any glass containers - so the customs officer will not wonder what that white powder is.

And if you are travelling in the developing world you may want to see your doctor for a course of upper and lower body antibiotics to have for ‘just in case’. If you don't use these medications is great to leave them with a nurse or doctor as these drugs may be hard to come by where you are travelling.

Share any important medical information with one or two other people either in country or in your travel group. If you get ill and are unable to speak for yourself, it's useful to have someone who knows any issues you are living with you can share key information like an allergy to medication with medical person.

Money Matters

Of course it does, and a little planning ahead will allow you to focus on the wonders of your study abroad and worry less about money.

First – create a budget using the worksheet in the Appendix 2.

Second - consider the following

- Currency rates
 - use a currency calculator on the internet to see what the value of the Canadian Dollar is vis a vis the country currency you will be visiting. This will be useful information when you are budgeting
 - pay attention to pricing – is it in US \$ or the currency of the country?
- Cash
 - take a small amount of money e.g. \$100 in the local currency with you into the country. That will allow you to pay for a taxi from the airport, buy a coffee or a snack prior to getting to your accommodation
 - ensure you have a bank card with you to allow you to get money from ATMs or at a bank as you need it. Find an ATM that is in a highly public area and if possible visit it with a friend rather than on your own.
 - DON'T travel around with large amounts of cash. You are already vulnerable as a traveler and carrying lots of cash only makes you more vulnerable.
 - keep your cash in a couple of places on your person when travelling. I usually keep a small amount in a deep pocket so that if I need to pay for something I am not showing large amounts of money. The rest is in a money belt hidden from view. I don't; access the money in a money belt while in public.
 - find a place to keep larger amounts of money – a hotel safety deposit box for example - so you are not carrying a lot of money.
- Credit cards
 - have at least one and ideally two different credit cards with you when you travel. If one card is compromised you will not be left stranded.
 - ensure you have a four digit PIN. Some countries banking systems cannot accommodate a six digit PIN and you do not want to be stranded.
 - ensure your card limit is appropriate to your travel budget.
 - notify the credit card company/s of your dates and location/s of travel. This will ensure they will not put a hold on your account because the spending is atypical for you.
- Banking
 - ensure you can online bank if you are going to be away for more than a month

- have someone at home – parent, sibling, partner – who can access your accounts in case you need help with your banking.
- consider providing a power of attorney if you will be gone for an extended period of time
- Travelers' cheques
 - Consider taking \$300 - \$500 in travelers' cheques, preferable in US dollars. There are two schools about using travelers' cheques. Some say they are redundant because there is always an ATM available. Others, like me, say they are a great safeguard for when you can't get your bank card to work. (I had that happen a couple of years ago in Taiwan and was really glad to have the ability to get some cash at the hotel using my travelers' cheques)
- Documentation
 - have your bank and credit card numbers written down – just in case.
 - Have copies of your traveler's cheques and keep them in a different place than your actual cheques so if they are lost you can take that copies to a bank for assistance
 - Know your PIN - don't write it down.

Third, keep a regular (weekly or daily) record of your expenditures. This will provide you with the confidence that you are on budget and if you begin to deviate you will know before it's too late. As well, if you plan to do more travelling in the future, the recorded expenditure will be a useful source of information for future budgeting

Packing

Rule 1 You need less than you think you do.

Rule 2 Pack light. You have to carry your own stuff.

Rule 3 Research your destination. Pack for the climate/ activities.

Rule 4 Plan to dress conservatively. Avoid looking wealthy or like a tourist.

Rule 5 Pack for a week. Plan to wash clothes in the sink or finding a local laundry

Considerations

- Do you need to bring linens for the bed or a towel?
- Monitor the amount of personal toiletries you use prior to travel and only bring that much with you avoid the big bottles

- Find out what the local electrical feed is and find the appropriate adaptors at a travel store
- Plan your carry on to include all your travel documents, basic toiletries and a change of underwear in case your bags don't arrive when you do.
- Carry your packed bags around your house - if you cannot do it yourself you have too much. Repack.

The packing dilemma can be a stress point in the weeks prior to departure. Check with your airlines/s for package restrictions and plan your packing with that in mind. You may want to ship a box separately if you are going to be away for some time.

Your best bet is to keep it simple. Use the list in Appendix 8 as a guideline and pick and choose what is essential for you.

Staying Connected

Consider how much you want to be connected with home while you are away. Factors to take into account might include

- Family and friends who will want to follow your experiences
- Banking and other legal issues you need to keep track of
- Course responsibilities at NIC
- How much you are feeling homesick or experiencing culture shock.

The trick is to find balance; enough connection to home and your life here as is needed to ensure those who care about you know you are safe and your responsibilities are attending to and enough disconnect to allow you to stay in the moment. If there ever was a time to remind yourself of the importance of Carpe Diem – it's now!

Some connections issues to consider include

- Your snail mail – is someone picking it up and dealing with anything that is important?
- Did you stop newspapers or magazines if you are going to be away for a longer period of time?
- Do you have a viable travel email account? one this is web based like yahoo, hotmail or Google. Have you shared it with those you want to stay in touch with? Did you populate it with key email addresses?
- Did you tell your landlord and your credit card company you will be away?
- Are you considering a blog? Did you set it up?
- Do you and your family/friends know the time difference from home to your destination?

- If you are taking a laptop, do you have Skype installed? Did you buy a credit if your family does not have Skype at home?
- If you taking a telephone with you, did you set up with your local provider appropriate accounts to avoid horrible roaming costs? Are you considering buying a phone in country?

Group travel

One of the great joys of travelling with a group is to have people to share experiences with, to debrief with each night and to talk to about your experiences when you get home. Often they are the ONLY ones who really get what the study abroad experience was really all about.

If you are going to be travelling with a group its useful to consider the realities of groups and to know that groups evolve using in a pattern. Knowing how groups develop and what people who are in a group need during each stage of the evolution will help you understand some of what is happening and perhaps allow you to contribute to a successful group experience.

Standard group development modeling suggests that groups to through the following stages

Forming – this is when the group is meeting each other. Usually people are a bit reserved during this phase, holding back their normal behavior until they figure out who is who, what the “rules” are and how people are going to connect with each other. During this phase the group leaders will provide a fair amount of structure to help people connect with each other and develop a sense of what rules and values will guide the group.

Storming – this is when the whole group or some members of the group react negatively to the way the group is developing. Some people “storm” out loud letting everyone know what they don’t like. Others will “storm” quietly talking to a few people they trust trying to make changes or figure out what is not working. Others will storm “silently” not saying anything but checking out or disconnecting from what the group is doing either physically or emotionally. During this phase the group leaders will help members share their concerns, explore why members are not happy and work with the members to find solutions. Expect group meetings and find ways to share what you are experienced. I’d encourage you to expect some storming, especially when you are away from your own culture and norms, and do what you can to help the leaders explore what need to be adjusted to help you and others. There

are groups that don't go through the storming phase and others who revisit it several times.

Norming – this is when you and other members of the group begin to think it's starting to come together. You'll note the first day everyone makes it to the bus on time. Norming is the time when the "rules" or norms are beginning to be understood and people are following them. Anticipate your group leaders will be helping you understand the expectations about everything from getting your luggage to the bus to when to ask questions to what dress is appropriate for your visit to the temple or NGO office. The norming phase may mean you need to ask questions if you are not sure about something. And of course not everyone in the group moves from storming to norming at the same time.

Performing – this is when the group has got it together. The members of the group anticipate each other's needs, help each other out; it all feels great. Your group leaders will be taking a less active role now because you and your fellow students know what to do and when to do it. Enjoy this time as it creates memories of a life time

Adjourning – this is the time for the group to celebrate its accomplishments and to say goodbye. It is a time of great happiness and some sadness about the moving on and leaving what you have helped create. Expect everyone to plan the celebration; the party, the "graduation", the dinner out, the appreciations for the special things group members did.

One last word. Groups develop this way in general and each group has a life of its own. Use this model to help you figure out what stage the group is in and what you can do to make the most of it.

Travelling alone

One of the great opportunities in life is the chance to travel alone, allowing you to do what you want when you want. It has its challenges if you are someone who likes to have others to share with but that can be accomplished by being open to meeting other travelers and students on exchange, by journaling or blogging and by keeping in touch with home.

When you are travelling on your own there are some guidelines to consider

- Ensure your family and NICI knows where you are living and what your travel itinerary is
- Keep in touch with family and NICI routinely

- Make connections with the exchange office, learning who your “go to” person is for questions and assistance
- Consider the kinds of linkages you want to make and how you will make them (are you looking for friends, others to study with, future business contacts, fellow weekend travelers)
- Use a balance of caution and exploration in making connections while you are on the road. Most people are can be trusted and learn to give your trust in stages as you see how others react

Last pieces of advice

A couple of last pieces of advice for your consideration as you prepare for departure.

- Keep your safety as a primary consideration. This means both your health, your personal safety as well as the key documents you need while you are way
- Know where your passport, your credit cards, your airline tickets are. Check on them regularly.
- Ignorance is not an excuse. You are expected to know follow the laws of the country you are visiting.
- Know who can help you if needed – Embassy, fellow students, instructors, NICI, family.
- Be alert to safety hazards and avoid them or mitigate them.
- If you are drinking alcohol, do it in moderation. Mistakes made when inebriated can change your life – forever!
- Avoid political demonstrations.
- Expect difference and embrace it with curiosity.
- Journal or blog as a way to help you reflect on your exchanges and how they are changing you.

Cultural Intelligence

So you have heard of IQ (we all hope we have a reasonable high one) and you have heard of EQ (we all hope we have a relatively high one of those too). Because you are a student at NIC where we are committed to building a strong international and intercultural dimension into all we do, NEED TO KNOW about CQ, Cultural Intelligence.

We live most of our lives, especially when we are at home in our own surrounding, living in our own cultural norms, on cruise control. We get it. We understand what is happening, what people mean when they use certain slang words, where we are supposed to stand when we enter a room, how to get money out of a bank machine, whether to talk or not to talk to the person next to us at the bus stop. What we get, in our own culture, is endless and is so second nature we are usually not even aware we get what we get.

But, put us into a culture unfamiliar to us it is much more challenging to get it! Is it ok to make eye contact with the kids on the subway? What is that on my dinner plate? Where do I put the coins to make a phone call? Is it ok for me to shake hands when I meet someone new? Why does the instructor not want to hear my thoughts on the information he just shared with the class?

The way to “get it” in a culture different from your own is to tap into and build your CQ. Cultural intelligence is made up of three parts

Knowledge – knowledge about what culture is, how cultures vary and how culture affects behavior.

Mindfulness – your ability and motivation to reflect on what you experience and explore the cultural cues you are receiving but perhaps not understanding

Skills – your development of a range of appropriate behaviours and the ability to choose which ones to use in a particular situation.

So, by now, you are figuring out that doing what you do here in Canada may not be ok when you get to where you are going. Great - you are using your mindfulness to cue in to the message I am sharing with you. When you land in your host country you will be entering a new world where the rules of engagement (which btw are not written down) are different. Your mission, since you have decided to take this study abroad experience, is to develop you CQ in order to learn the most you can, have the most fun you can and avoid as much as you can putting your proverbial foot in your mouth, embarrassing yourself or worse getting yourself into trouble.

A little homework for you to continue on your road to develop your CQ

- Read Six strategies for building confidence communicating interculturality. It's a quick read and in Appendix 3 of this handbook
- Check out [this website](#) – Online Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad Module One - great start to adding to your intercultural skills.
- And check on [this website](#) - Centre for Intercultural Learning - for the country you are travelling to – lots of intelligence on their culture here.
- If you are going to a country, learn at least a few words of greetings, appreciation and asking. The web has lots of sites - just Google please, thank you, hello. Or if you have more prep time, consider taking a language course at NIC or through NIDES (free access to Rosetta Stone).
- Try completing *What do you know about where you are going?* in Appendix 3 and *Cultural Comparisons* in Appendix 4.
- And to get you thinking – try the *UBC Cultural Values Questionnaire*. No right or wrong answers but lots to think about. It's in Appendix 7.
- Want to know more about CQ? Check out the NIC library. Anything by Early and Ang is a good start. I also found Cultural Intelligence: Living and Working Globally (Thomas and Inkson, 2009 Berrett- Koehler Publishers San Francisco) an easy read.

Culture Shock

Feelings of disorientation and confusion are at the core of culture shock, a reality for almost all travelers and a fixture for those traveling by themselves or in small groups and especially for those away for long periods of time.

Culture shock usually happens in waves; typified by an initial euphoria, followed by a sense of "why did I say I would do this". Most people figure out how to cope and that is then followed by a feeling of confidence; that I can handle this.

The next wave is related to the sinking feeling that I have to handle this for a long time and I am not sure how I am going to cope with missing family, familiar cultural values and objects.

And for those who are able to move beyond this there is a settling in, an ability to become integrated. For some there is a continual set of waves which come and go; others find their "cultural feet" and are settled in the new place.

Cultural shock is typified by disruptions in eating patterns, feelings of loneliness, disorientation and confusion, and an enhanced valuing of one's own culture. If your goal is to build some connection to and understanding of the culture in which you are living, experiencing culture shock is a good thing, because it signals you have begun to engage!

Strategies for living with culture shock

A useful way to think about culture shock is as a stress reaction. This then allows each of us to think about what we do in our life in Canada to work through stress; exercise, meditate, seek counseling, socialize, diarize, modify eating or sleeping habits. By using one or some of these healthy strategies we can effectively deal with the stress and the shock of living and studying in another culture.

Get physically active

Walk, bike, swim – do something to get your heart rate up for at least 30 minutes.

Diarize

If you decide that diarizing is a helpful strategy to work through your culture shock and to explore what you are learning about yourself, here are some questions which might guide your writing

1. What experience this week did you find most stressful?
2. How did you deal with this stressful situation?
3. If you could replay the situation, is there something you might do differently?
4. What are the most interesting thing/s that happened this week? Why?
5. What are the most important insights you have had about yourself this week?

(modified from N. Arthur (2001) Using Critical Incidents to investigate cross- cultural transitions; International Journal of Intercultural Relations 25, 41 -53)

Focus on your goals – are you doing what you wanted to do?
Learning what you planned to learn?

Communicate with home - regular contact with NICI is expected

Appendix

The following appendices are available as PDFs. Print those that are useful to you.

1. Exchange Students – Issues to consider before departure
2. Budgeting for your Study Abroad
3. Six strategies for building confidence communicating interculturallly
4. What do you know about where you are going?
5. Cultural Comparisons
6. Medical Matters
7. Cultural Values Orientation
8. Packing lists

NICI Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 1

Exchange Students

Issues to consider before departure

- **ORIENTATION** Have you read the information provided by your host institution? Did you return all the forms required by them? Is there an orientation program provided? When? Where?
- **ENROLLMENT** Do you enroll in your study abroad classes at NIC? or when you arrive in at your host school?
- **RESPONSIBILITIES** Do you understand your responsibilities as an exchange student at your host institution and at NIC?
- **TRANSFER OF COURSES** Have you confirmed the courses you want to take will transfer back to NIC?
- **COURSE CHANGES** How do you get NIC approval to change a course after approved by your NIC advisor?
- **FAILING A CLASS** What are the implications if happens if you fail a class? How will it affect your graduation plans?
- **PASS/FAIL COURSES** Can you take a Pass/Fail course? How many?
- **INTERNSHIPS** What are the expectations of your internship? Who do you contact if you have questions?
- **PRE-REGISTRATION FOR YOUR RETURNING SEMESTER** How and when do you do this?
- **GRADUATION** Will you be eligible to graduate while you are abroad? If so please contact Student Services for advice.
- **TAX PLANNING** Print a copy of the [TL11A Tuition, Education, and Textbook Amounts Certificate - University Outside Canada](#) form and take it with you. You will need the University to complete the form to confirm your months of studies while away and then to include with your tax claim. NIC will issue you a [T2202A](#) form for the tuition paid at NIC for the study aboard period. Submit both forms with your tax return.

NICI Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 2

Budgeting for your Study Abroad

This worksheet is meant to provide you with food for thought as you consider how to finance your study abroad. You will need to consider all the financial resources you might be able to access and be REALISTIC about the costs of travelling and living abroad.

I recommend you use the following lists to develop a summary of both the resources you have available to you and the costs you will incur and then work towards creating a balance and ideally have more in the resources column than in the expenses column.

Developing this list will take some work so be sure to plan some time for it. There is lots of money out there if you take the time to look for it and complete applications thoughtfully. I can guarantee you that spending time carefully researching travel and living costs while away will allow you to appreciate and make the most out of each day.

Resources for your research will include travel guides like Lonely Planet, Rough Guide or Lets Go. (Vancouver Island Public Library has a great selection). You will also find the internet a great resource as well be your sponsoring instructor and NICI.

Consider the following resources to fund your study abroad

- Your savings account
- A loan or gift from your parents
- A fundraiser to support your travels
- Bursaries or scholarships available through the College or on line
- Funding as part of the study abroad program
- Part time work
- And lesser desirable options to consider include
 - Spending to your credit card limit
 - Borrowing funds from family, friends, the bank

Expenses to consider

- Air fare beginning from your home community. Be sure to include the taxes including airport fees. They can add \$300+ to your budget
- On the ground travel costs – trains, busses, taxis. You will need your itinerary in front of you as you research this.

NICI Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 3

Six Strategies for Building Confidence Communicating Interculturally

I am assuming if you are reading this you have made a decision to explore how you can communicate with more confidence with people who come from cultures other than the one you grew up in. Making that decision, even if it tentative, is the first in a lifelong journey that will offer you opportunities for understanding and friendships not possible before. Know that by being open to enhancing your intercultural communication you will make mistakes; and learn from them. You'll also reduce your anxiousness about talking with people from away, and you will develop an openness to difference that will offer chances to share in ways you have not experienced before.

Plan to adopt curiosity, mindfulness and an appreciation for difference and you WILL be rewarded for your efforts.

The following is a compilation of several excellent academic articles which focus on intercultural communication. The articles are posted on the NICI intranet site and can also be obtained from the NICI office in Courtenay. Feedback and sharing of your intercultural communication experiences and revelations are always welcome.

1. Assume there **are** differences between you and the other person!

Study the history, political structure, art, literature, and language of the country. This study will help you create a framework to observe. It will also help you to become curious, less judgemental and more comfortable with ambiguity (lack of certainty). All of this will help you be less defensive and more open to learning. You might also start to realize how some of your values and assumptions, from your cultural perspective, might be different from the other person.

2. Recognize that language will get in the way.

Definitely work on improving your use of the language, but also realize that words can have more than one meaning, depending on the situation. Understand that a different tone might create a slight difference in meaning. Use your new language, even if it is only Hola (an informal hello in Spanish) and arigato (Thanks in Japanese), you have opened doors to more communication.

Language patterns also create differences in meaning. For example in some countries it is normal when asked if you would like something to eat to say no the first time, no the second time and only on the third time give your real answer. Listen, observe, ask questions with sincerity and again, expect difference.

Know that culture is also reflected in how a language is spoken. Volume, articulation, pitch range and intensity, pace and accent are all parts of paralanguage that are embedded in culture. For example Arabic spoken by two male friends may seem like an argument to a North American. The pace of Spanish is much faster than northern European languages.

How someone says something is as important as what they say. Consider both messages and be curious about any dissonance between the two messages.

And it's worth remembering that many cultures have English as their language of communication so just because someone is from away does not mean they don't speak English.

Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 4

What do you know about where you are going?

1. On a map of the world
 - a. Locate and name the country you are travelling to
 - b. Locate and name the neighboring countries

2. Sketch a map of the country
 - a. Locate and name the key cities
 - b. Locate and name the community/area you are going to be living in
 - c. Place major geographic features; mountain ranges, rivers, large lakes

3. Find out the following
 - a. Current country leader
 - b. Currency and its trading parity with the CON \$
 - c. Passport / visa regulation regarding visitors/students
 - d. Type of government
 - e. Key political and economic trading partners
 - f. Language/s spoken and useful phrases
 - h. Key historical events, particularly over the last century
 - i. Current political and economic situation
 - j. Important social factors
 - e.g. ecological footprint mortality for those under 5,
 - literacy rate, % of people with access to potable water
 - k. Canada's relationship with this country in recent years
 - l. What first hand/second hand knowledge do you have of this country?
 - m. Travel risks associated with living in the country and in the community

NICI Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 5

Cultural Comparisons

What differences and similarities are there between your host culture and Canadian culture? [Centre for Intercultural Learning](#) is a useful resource.

	Canadian Culture	Host Culture
Communication Styles		
Gestures		
Personal Appearance		
Recreation and Leisure Activities		
Eating Habits		
Food (Diet)		
Family Lifestyle		
Dating/Marriage		
Religion and Spirituality		
Local Views on Sex, Alcohol and Drugs		

NICI Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 6

Medical Matters

1. HEALTH HABITS

What health risks are there in your host country?

What are the health risks in other countries or areas you may visit?

2. PRECAUTIONS

What should you do to protect yourself from health risks identified above?

Vaccinations? Medicines in your travel kit? Specific clothing? Behaviours to add or reconsider?

3. PRESCRIPTIONS

Are you taking any prescription medicines that you will need while abroad?

Do you have enough medicine to last you the entire time that you are abroad?

If not, how will you get your medication while you are abroad?

4. MEDICAL SERVICES in your Host Country?

For exchange students, what are medical services provided by your host institutions?

For field school and practicum students, what medical services are available where you will be living and travelling?

5. MEDICAL INSURANCE

What does your medical insurance cover? What's missing? How can you accommodate services you might need that are not covered?

What do you need to do before/during/after medical intervention to ensure your insurance plan will cover the expenses? (Tip: Read your medical insurance pamphlet)

CULTURAL VALUES ORIENTATIONS

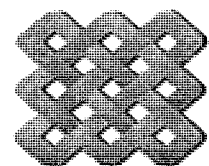
1	Rules are more important than relationships, and should be applied evenly, regardless of who you are or what the situation is.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Relationships are more important than rules: rules should be adapted to fit the situation or relationship.
2	How I live reflects on me as an individual.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	How I live reflects on my family, friends, and colleagues.
3	People should use words to say exactly what they mean, no matter who they are talking to or what the situation - don't beat around the bush.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	People should be indirect in their strong praise or criticism, using subtle words and references to convey the idea without causing loss of face.
4	People should deal with each other as equals, no matter what their sex, wealth, or social status.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	People should treat some people with greater respect because of their status, based on wealth, sex, or social position.
5	Quality of life is more important than career success.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Career success is more important than quality of life.
6	Uncertainty is a normal feature of life and each day is accepted as it comes.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	The uncertainty of life is felt as a continuous threat which must be fought.
7	I see time as limitless and schedules as flexible. It's not necessary to finish one thing before starting another.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	People need to adjust to meet the demands of schedules and deadlines. It is best to work on one thing at a time.

Based on the work of

Hall, E.T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Toronto, ON: Doubleday.

Hofstede, G. & Hofstede, G.J. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill.

Trompenaars, F. & Hampden-Turner, C. (1998). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding global diversity in global business* (2nd ed.). Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill.



NICI Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 8

Packing lists

Clothing

1 pair of walking shoes (break them in before you go to avoid blisters)

1 pair of flip-flops (showers may be less than scrupulously clean)

3-5 pairs of socks

5-7 pair of underwear

1-2 pair of shorts

1-2 skirts/trousers

2 shirts

1 sweater/sweatshirt

1 poncho/rain jacket

1 light jacket

1 bathing suit

1 hat

1 semi-nice outfit (2-3 if you plan on attending formal events)

Toiletries – use travel size containers to save space and weight

Glasses, sunglasses, contact lenses and cleaning solution (copy of lens prescription)

Toothbrush/toothpaste

Soap and shampoo

Comb and brush

Sunscreen, moisturizers, cosmetics

Deodorant

Kleenex

Tampons

Razor blades

Med Kit

Prescription medicine -keep it in the original bottle and carry a copy of the prescription

Headache med (aspirin or Tylenol for example)

Diarrhea med

Antihistamine

Band aids of various sizes (some – not the whole box)

Antiseptic swabs

Tweezers