

Toolkit for Going Abroad

Please review the condensed guide from AMSA's Going Abroad Toolkit below. For the complete guide, please visit <http://www.amsa.org/AMSA/Homepage/About/Committees/Global/GoingAbroadToolkit.aspx>.

Students should understand that crafting a study abroad experience that meets HWCAM and LCME standards is difficult and time-consuming. At the present time consideration will only be given for international programs offered by other LCME-accredited medical schools, official courses contained in the course catalog of well-known non-U.S. medical schools and universities, GHLO opportunities, or programs sponsored by trusted U.S. or international organizations (e.g. International Red Cross).

Governmental Agencies

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Global Health.gov](#)
- [U.S. Embassy Homepage](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)

How do I pick the program that is best for me?

Several factors can help you decide which program to select. The most important factor to consider is personal safety. Research the political situation of the country you are interested. Check out www.travel.state.gov for a listing of countries that are on the State's Department Warning List.

Cost is always relevant. You may want to ask the program what is included in any fees.

Finally, assess your objectives. Is language acquisition or strengthening a primary objective? Ask the program specific questions to make sure that your objectives will be met. You should also be aware of what types of environments you enjoy working in. Are you an independent person who wants to work in environments where there is less structure? Or do you enjoy working with a group in a very structured program? Also examine your program's approach to service. Is it compatible with your value system?

Do certain programs have more difficulties being recognized for credit by the student's home institution? If so, what can be done?

For various reasons, some schools are less accepting of clinical rotations overseas than others. You can have the program you are interested in send your school detailed information about the elective. This will give your school and the other school a chance to reach a resolution to your benefit.

Language: do I need to speak the local language?

Although several hospitals will not require you to speak the local language, various difficulties can arise that may frustrate you, so a good attitude will go a long way toward a positive experience. Choosing to work in a country where you do speak the native language will allow you to benefit from the overall experience without the additional stress of not being able to communicate with the native people.

However, one of the single most important skills you can take away from time in another culture is a functional level of another language. It allows you to connect with patients if you speak their language. They will feel more comfortable with you, and the intimacy so fundamental to the therapeutic alliance of the patient-physician relationship is a natural extension of their gratitude for your effort. If you choose to learn one of the languages clearly useful in the area where you will live and practice, you will then have direct access to many of the underserved populations whose health care is otherwise compromised by language barriers. Though studying language coursework within a country where it's not the local language is useful, it is much more efficient to take the plunge into immersion language training before you enter the clinical setting. Clinical experience is important, and the perspective you gain from learning about other systems and circumstances will enrich your ability to care for patients, but language skills are priceless.

Questions to ask about housing

1. Do you have dormitories for international students?
2. What are the differences between the dorms specified for international students verses those for regular students?
3. How far are the dorms from the hospital/clinic?
4. If I have to walk to the hospital, will I feel safe walking?
5. If I cannot walk to the hospital, is there readily available, cost effective, and reliable transportation?
6. Will I feel safe using the public transportation system?

Concerning Safety

1. How are foreigners viewed in this country?
2. Have they been any recent kidnappings?
3. What is the current political situation in this country?
4. How much contact will I have with the outside world (internet)?
5. Will I be able to lock up valuables when I am absent?
6. What is this country's perception of women?

Assessing Program Content

1. Is the program highly structured, or will I be organizing my own schedule?
2. What are my clinical responsibilities?
3. What will be my duties as a student?
4. Will I be with other students from the United States?
5. Can I speak with someone in the department I am most interested?
6. What types of outside programming is offered? Classes? Excursions? Service projects?
7. Is there an orientation? Cultural awareness training?
8. What are the relationships of the people who work in the program with those in the community? Are they integrated?
9. What access will I have to textbooks?

Packing

1. What items do I need to bring with me (mosquito net, etc.)?
2. What medical supplies and personal items should I bring?
3. What will the weather be like?
4. What is the dress code, both for working in the program and in the community? How can I dress to be culturally sensitive?

If you manage to get all or most of these questions answered in a way that pleases you, you've probably found a program that's a good match for you. Good luck, and let us know if you have any questions, insights, ideas or stories you'd like to share!

Planning Your Trip

Country Information and Travel Advisories

- [Travel Health Information Service](#) - excellent advisory
- [U.S. State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs](#)

Immunizations

- [Up to Date immunization recommendations from the CDC](#)
- [WHO recommendations](#)