
STUDY ABROAD VISA TIPS

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Passport requirement

You must have a passport valid for the duration of your stay abroad in order to apply for a visa and to travel abroad. Many countries require your passport be valid at least six months beyond your intended stay. For information on how to apply for or renew your passport, visit www.travel.state.gov.

What is a visa?

A visa is an official authorization, affixed to a passport, permitting entry into and travel within a particular country or region for a specific period of time.

Start researching visa requirements now!

Again, you must have a valid passport in order to apply for a visa and many countries require your passport be valid at least six months past your intended stay in that country. For instance, if you are studying abroad for the fall semester and returning to the U.S. at the end of December, your passport should be valid through the end of the following June at the very least.

Some countries require you to obtain a visa in the U.S. before you depart or at a consulate abroad once you arrive in the foreign country. Costs and entrance requirements vary so it is crucial that you begin researching the process EARLY. It is your responsibility to determine the requirements and to apply for a visa in a timely manner. Find out now what visas, if any, you will need for countries you will study in and visit. Visas can take weeks or months to process. You may be required to have an FBI background check conducted and/or to appear in person to obtain the visa. Usually, you cannot apply for a visa until you have received a letter of acceptance from a study abroad program, but you should begin your research and document preparation now.

Again, it is your responsibility to determine the visa requirements and to apply for a visa in a timely manner.

Note: If you are not a U.S. citizen, there may be special requirements for you to obtain a visa. Check with the appropriate foreign embassy or consulate to find out what procedures you must follow. Also, make sure you check in with your International Student Advisor in the Office of International Affairs (OIA) to discuss any necessary U.S. immigration issues related to travel abroad.

To find information on foreign embassies/consulates and visa requirements, visit U.S. State Dept list of foreign embassies at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>.

Visa application tips

Visa application requirements and processes can vary greatly from country to country, and even from consulate to consulate for the same country. For instance, the Spanish Consulate in New York may have different requirements than the Spanish Consulate in Chicago. The process can be time-consuming and complicated. The following tips are designed to help prepare you for the process.

- As you work through the visa process, always remind yourself to be **Patient, Persistent, and Polite.**
- When you apply for a visa, you are dealing with the government of a foreign country. They can make and change their policies and procedures at any time and they will be the ones deciding whether or not to issue you a visa.

- If you download visa application materials from a website, call/email the consulate to be sure that you have the most recent version (unless the website states that it is). Make sure you periodically check the consulate website for any changes.
- Read the application and instructions very carefully. Read everything TWICE. This will enable you to ask appropriate and informed questions if you contact the consulate.
- If you have specific questions or concerns regarding the visa requirements, it is always best to get answers directly from a consulate employee and to get the answers in writing if possible. The Office of International Affairs can provide general resources and tips regarding visas, but OIA staff members are not agents of foreign countries, so our ability to help you fill out visa applications is extremely limited.
- Consulates generally have very limited open hours both for answering the telephone and for public appearances. Make sure you check their hours before calling. You may have to attempt to contact them multiple times before you reach someone to address your questions.
- When you speak with someone at a consulate, write a detailed record of the conversation: date, time, full name of person with whom you spoke, and their comments or answers or recommendations. If possible, get your answers in writing.
- Don't assume anything. If, for example, the visa application asks for your address while in country, and you won't have that information until you arrive overseas, ask the consulate what to write in that space. Some may accept "TBA", some may accept the program address, some may not accept it without the actual address. Always ask; do not try to guess how to answer any question.
- Again, requirements vary, but in general, expect to provide the following when applying for a student visa: demographic information about yourself and your parents, including dates and places of birth; your passport; certification of health and/or certain immunizations; letter of acceptance to your study abroad program and/or host institution; letter verifying that you are currently enrolled in good standing at NCCU; detailed financial support information, notarized, i.e., bank statements (family and self), financial aid sources, etc.; proof of health insurance coverage abroad; your round-trip plane ticket to your study abroad country. Some countries require an FBI background check as part of the application. This process can take 12 weeks or more. Plan accordingly.
- Don't be surprised if this is not all that is required! This is why it is absolutely essential that you determine your specific requirements very early on in the study abroad process.
- Allow at least three weeks when requesting documents such as letters of acceptance, enrollment verification, etc.
- You may have to appear at a consulate in person to submit your visa application materials. If this is a requirement, there is most likely no way to get around it. Do not expect the consulate to make an exception for you. For instance, if the Spanish Embassy in Washington, D.C., requires you to apply there, you must be prepared to drive, fly, or take a bus or train to DC even if it is inconvenient or expensive. Some consulates require appointments; others do not.
- When you apply for a visa, you must submit your passport with the application. Therefore, it may not be possible for you to travel outside the U.S. prior to your term abroad.
- **Double check all documents before submission and make a copy of all documents for your records!**