



Mental Health Issues and Studying Abroad

Thousands of college students study abroad every year and have a wonderful experience. We suppose that they have a wonderful experience due to their passion and their planning. Having a psychological disorder or just being overly anxious or prone to sadness when away from friends and family is no reason to not study abroad. You just have to plan ahead.

1. If you are currently being treated for a disorder (panic attacks, phobias, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorder, etc.) the most important thing to do before going abroad is to talk with your therapist about what you can do before and during your trip to get the most out of it.
2. If you have a disorder, but do not have a therapist at this time, consider making an appointment at your university counseling center. You can talk with a therapist about steps you can take to ensure that your trip is successful. Our services are confidential. We will not talk with anyone about you. It is not mandatory that you have a therapist before you go abroad, but setting up a meeting before you leave is an excellent idea.
3. If you have a lot of anxiety or sadness, but have never been to a mental health therapist before, this would be a good time to make an appointment at the counseling center. We focus on students' strengths and help you develop coping skills to maintain a calm and positive outlook.

Here are some things you might want to do before going abroad that involve a therapist and/or medical professional.

1. Have a plan on who you will talk to if you start feeling worse, helpless, or out of control. This list can include your study abroad faculty, your therapist at home or on campus, your physician at home or on campus, and your family.
2. Know the laws regarding traveling with prescription medications in the countries you will visit. *Take all medications while traveling abroad.* Don't be proud, don't be ashamed; going abroad is a terrible time to try not taking your medication, even if you are feeling good. Also understand that mental health treatment varies from country to country. Some cultures do not recognize mental health issues; a manic episode, for example, might be treated with imprisonment instead of stabilizing medication and supportive rest.
3. Plan on how you will have enough medication while away. You might be able to take all you need with you; you might have to get refills while away.
4. Work with a therapist to come up with a list of warning signs and positive coping techniques that you can use while abroad. Daily meditation, relaxation, exercise, staying in touch with friends and family, finding someone on the trip who will help you out on down days, slow days, and anxious days are examples of what you can do to ensure a successful trip.
5. Again, don't be proud or ashamed. Lots of people are dealing with mental health issues or disorders. The person writing this handout takes a pill every morning for depression. Some of us just inherited a biological system that is too effective at producing anxiety or sadness. These are the cards we were dealt; it isn't our fault, but it is our responsibility to stick to a plan.

Many campuses provide psychological and medical services to students. You can contact their offices to make an appointment with a therapist. You can call and tell us that you want to set up an appointment to talk about study abroad.