

## **Wellness Tips for SIT Study Abroad / IHP Students**

SIT Study Abroad offers exciting and challenging academic programs. As you prepare for your study abroad experience, please read through the information that follows. We highly recommend that you create a personal wellness plan for yourself to make the most of your time with SIT. If you are currently working with a mental health provider or other health professional, we encourage you to involve them collaboratively in this process.

### **Health review process**

Students who are currently managing a medical or mental health condition are encouraged to discuss any concerns pre-departure with their health professional and/or the Student Health, Safety and Well-Being staff at SIT Study Abroad. SIT's health review process is designed to support students in making the safest and most reasonable choices regarding their physical and mental health; full disclosure on health forms is necessary to aid in this process. In addition, a complete medical history will aid SIT in helping you understand conditions and resources abroad related to health issues and can assist staff in responding safely and quickly in case of an emergency. Health review questions can be directed to [studenthealth@sit.edu](mailto:studenthealth@sit.edu)

### **Mental health**

A key aspect of SIT Study Abroad is the experience of adapting to another culture. The cultural immersion process requires psychological flexibility in the face of different customs, beliefs, and living conditions. These new situations may trigger "culture shock" while studying abroad, marked by symptoms such as sadness, anxiety, homesickness, and difficulties eating or sleeping, to name a few. The adjustment process, with all its ups and downs, is a manageable experience for the vast majority. But sometimes pre-existing health conditions can become exacerbated in new settings. You are always encouraged to seek assistance if you are not feeling well or have any questions at all.

Views on mental health vary greatly around the world, as do the types of resources that are available. Some countries have a broad range of services, including access to English-speaking or Western-trained providers, while others have more limited options. SIT has

identified counseling resources in-country, where available. However, you can best prepare for a positive study abroad experience by developing a set of healthy coping strategies that you can utilize while on the program. These might include journaling; reaching out to a friend; taking a walk; meditation; yoga; breathing exercises; avoiding substances such as alcohol, caffeine, or sugar; or simply taking prescribed medications as directed.

### **Disability support**

If you have questions about disability or are a student with a disability and would like to request accommodations during your study abroad program, please contact [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu) as early as possible. During your process of choosing and preparing for a program, please visit the [Mobility International](#) website for a wide selection of questions to consider, personal stories of intercultural sojourners, and helpful resources.

### **Preparing for your specific program**

You are encouraged to explore not only the academic and cultural opportunities available in your chosen program, but also how the program structure might impact you on a personal level. As you prepare for your Study Abroad experience and shape your personal wellness plan, here are some aspects to consider:

- What is the nature and length of your program? Semester long, summer, single / multi-country, short term, custom?
- How physically rigorous is the program?
- What is the nature of the learning community during your program? How much group work and contact with fellow students can you anticipate? How much private, down time is optimal for you, and how will you adapt if there is less alone time than you are used to?
- What is the expected amount of travel / excursions? For example, most programs include in-country excursions while others involve travel to several different countries, resulting in frequent periods of transition and cultural adjustment.
- Do you have social identities (such as sexual orientation, gender identity / expression, religion, race, ethnicity to name a few) that are important for you to express?
- Is there a homestay component and if so, what is the location / duration of the homestay? What can you expect in the family context?
- What are other lodging considerations? Will you be sharing a room with another student during travel?

- What is the availability of in-country medical and mental health resources?
- If you take prescription medications, can you bring an adequate supply with you into the country?
- What is the access to internet and phone usage for maintaining connections back home?

## Components of a wellness plan

- **Identify stress triggers.**  
Consider the types of situations that you find particularly stressful. Awareness of potential stressors is the first step in minimizing difficulties or responding effectively if they do occur.
- **List specific coping strategies** that are useful for you and that you can employ while on program.
- **Enlist your support system.**  
Identify in advance people who are willing and available to be part of your support team – parents, other family members, friends back home, or therapist. Think about how to obtain meaningful support while abroad for identities or matters that may be important to you, for example, sexual orientation, gender identity / expression, race, ethnicity, disability, religion or spiritual practice, maintaining sobriety, and so forth.
- **Get adequate sleep.**  
Sleep is foundational for optimal physical and mental health. Traveling internationally across time zones or adjusting to a new environment with its distinct sleeping arrangements can lead to disrupted sleep. Bring along ear plugs or listen to relaxation apps to help you fall asleep in new situations.
- **Consider diet.**  
New foods and eating customs are an important part of the study abroad experience, but diet changes can sometimes disrupt gastrointestinal functioning. Keep an open mind and enjoy the local cuisine, but also bring along over-the-counter remedies or calming teas and identify bland foods in-country that you can rely on if you don't feel well.
- **Incorporate exercise into your routine.**

Maintaining physical activity is important for well-being. Find out about local resources / options in-country in terms of exercise or sports. If you are a jogger or like to take yoga classes but will be in a location where those are not an option, investigate other ways to get exercise that are culturally appropriate and available.

- **Develop communication strategies and know how to ask for help.**

Know your early warning signs of stress, anxiety, depression, or other health conditions. Practice communicating your symptoms both in English and the host language. Write down translations of specific terminology in the host language that you may need to communicate with a health professional. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between normal adjustment to a new environment versus symptoms of a more serious health issue. When in doubt, it is best to consult with a health professional. Do not wait until your symptoms are severe and interfere with functioning; inform your Academic Director, Program Director, or other SIT staff as soon as possible.

### **In conclusion**

Planning in advance is the first step in proactively shaping an enjoyable study abroad experience. But there is much that cannot be predicted or controlled, and many experiences will surprise you once you are immersed in the new setting. After all, that's part of the attraction of studying abroad! Maintaining flexibility and a positive attitude will go a long way in helping you to adapt and embrace your cross-cultural experience. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or address your concerns at any point along the way, and best wishes for a wonderful experience with SIT Study Abroad.

### **Resources**

Program specific information	Your admissions counselor
Health information	<a href="mailto:studenthealth@sit.edu">studenthealth@sit.edu</a>
Mental health information	<a href="mailto:counseling@sit.edu">counseling@sit.edu</a>
Disability information	<a href="mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu">disabilityservices@sit.edu</a> <a href="http://www.miusa.org">www.miusa.org</a>