

Generic Preparation Guide for Staff & Students Going on Short-Term Study Tours to Asia



SECTION 3: CULTURE & LANGUAGE PREPARATION



ADVICE FOR STAFF

- Include cultural and language information as part of program preparation activities, or create separate preparation activities specifically dealing with culture and language.
- Students going on intercultural study tours are generally very eager to find out more about what they are likely to experience in their new environments. This includes knowing about:
 - Traditions, customs and norms
 - What not to bring (e.g., pork or pork products are not to be consumed around Muslim hosts)
 - What not to do (e.g., taboos and prohibitions)
 - Specific items they may wish to bring, such as:
 - Gifts for buddies, mentors, hosts
 - Souvenirs from Australia to give out
 - Head scarves and other appropriate attire for cultural and religious reasons
 - Things to pack that can relieve students' culture shock (such as food and familiar comforts from home)

- Encourage students to be proactive in researching their intended destinations. A good idea is to ask students individually or in groups, to contribute a short presentation on a particular aspect of the intended destination, to be delivered at a preparation seminar.
- Encourage students to equip themselves with basic knowledge of the host language. Alternatively, basic language sessions may be included as part of pre-departure preparation.
- If basic language training is not included as part of preparation, inform students of useful language resources available online.
- Some ways to introduce students to the culture of their intended destination include the following:
 - Organise a lunch or dinner at a local restaurant that serves the cuisine of the host culture. You might even like to invite the owners or staff at the restaurant to take part in a question and answer session. This activity might become a regular feature of future program preparation and you can add to your network of cultural insiders to introduce to students (while sharing a delicious meal).
 - Invite international students or staff members who come from the host culture to speak to students and answer questions about their home country.
 - Invite past participants of the program to attend preparation seminars, to speak to the current cohort of students.
 - Invite staff and other students who have had experience travelling to the host country, to speak to students.
- Familiarise students with the concept of culture shock, including causes, symptoms and ways to alleviate it.
- As part of a post-trip strategy, de-briefing seminars provide an opportunity to discuss reverse culture shock with students.

ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

- Preparation is the best strategy to alleviate culture shock and to promote a more positive program experience. Some tips to prepare for your intercultural experiences include:
 - Attending preparation activities provided by the program organisers and participating in social activities or online discussion activities. In addition to promoting group cohesion and bonding, cultural details regarding your intended destination may be discussed by students and staff.
 - Seek out friends, family and other people who can become your 'cultural guides'. These individuals may already be involved in preparation activities. Cultural guides can come

from the culture or country in question, or may have experience in travelling there. Setting up a support network of cultural guides will assist you in working through the many questions and concerns you may have as you prepare for your trip.

- Research your intended destination. Knowing more about the places you are visiting is likely to contribute to a more rewarding intercultural experience. Some details you might like to know about include:
 - Weather, climate and seasons
 - History
 - Political and social systems
 - Geographical characteristics
 - Main languages spoken, useful vocabulary and slang to remember
 - Orientation – obtain maps of your intended destination and locate the places you will be visiting
 - The airport
 - Currency used and exchange rate
 - Cost of basic necessities (e.g., phone, internet, postage, transport and food)
 - Social customs, social etiquette and norms
 - Major religions
 - Dress codes
 - Differences relating to measurements and voltage
 - Medical services
 - Other public services and amenities
- Learn more about culture shock, so you are aware of the signs to look out for that indicate you may be experiencing it, and are better informed of ways to deal with it.
- It's a good idea to keep a travel journal to record your experiences and reflections. In some programs, this may be a part of your program assessment.
- Pack a 'care package' to take with you. Include food items and other things that will alleviate homesickness and culture shock. Add these items to your packing checklist.
- You might like to bring souvenirs from Australia to give to your new friends and contacts.

USEFUL LINKS

Cultural Adjustment and Culture Shock

- The University of the Pacific's cultural adjustment module (contains useful topics and reflection questions relating to cultural adjustment while travelling)

<http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>

- PDF (slides) on the types and characteristics of culture shock from the University of Queensland
<http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/file/163>

Asian Culture, Customs and Country Information

- Atlapedia (key geographical information and statistics)
www.atlapedia.com/index/.html
- World Weather Information Service
<http://worldweather.wmo.int/en/home.html>
- Culture
<http://goasia.about.com/od/Customs-and-Traditions/>
<http://goseasia.about.com/od/culturepeople/>
http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/Local_Customs-Asia-TG-C-1.html
- Destination Guides
<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/asia/>
<https://www.justlanded.com/> (select the country from the drop-down menu)
<http://www.everyculture.com/> (countries are listed alphabetically)
www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>

Language Guides & Entertainment

- www.intrepidtravel.com/languageguides
- www.bbc.co.uk/languages/
- www.openculture.com/freelanguagelessons
- Time Out – a world-wide guide to entertainment
www.timeout.com



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