

 **Gilman** Scholarship.

# PRE-DEPARTURE TOOLKIT





Congratulations on receiving the U.S. Department of State's Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship! As a Gilman scholar, you are part of a legacy that has awarded thousands of students with scholarships to study and intern abroad in more than 160 countries around the world. Gilman scholars represent all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Guam, North Marianas Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands and come from more than 1,300 colleges and universities across the nation. We congratulate you on this significant accomplishment!

You are about to start on an incredibly exciting adventure. This packet includes information that will help prepare you for your time abroad. This document is by no means a comprehensive preparation for your time abroad but should be used to complement the information provided by your individual program and an open mind.

We wish you all the best during your time abroad!



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## Expectations of Gilman Scholars

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- Positively represent the United States and Gilman on your program abroad and at your campus/internship location.
- Follow guidelines set forth in the Terms & Conditions contract (linked in your Scholarship Decision Form in your Gilman account).
- Notify the Gilman Program of any changes to your program or to plans outlined in your application.
- Follow guidelines regarding use of Gilman Scholarship funds. Gilman funds must be used only to pay for eligible study/intern abroad program costs (program tuition, room and board), other study/intern abroad-related costs (books, local transportation, international insurance, visa fees, lab fees) and airfare in accordance with the [Fly America Act](#). Gilman Scholarship funds cannot be used for personal expenses, airfare for travel not in accordance with the Fly America Act, or for travel that is not a part of, or required by, the recipient's study/intern abroad program. Use of Gilman Scholarship funds for any purpose other than those outlined in the Terms and Conditions contract may be cause for revocation of the award.

## Receiving Your Scholarship Funds

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Review the [Pre-Departure Checklist](#) and complete the requirements therein.

All award documentation must be submitted and approved before you can receive your scholarship funds. Review the [Award Guidelines](#) on the Gilman website or in the Document Collection section of your Gilman portal to ensure you are submitting the correct documentation.

Check out the [Recipients FAQs](#) and [Receiving Your Scholarship](#) pages of the Gilman website. [Contact the Gilman Program](#) (based on your host region) with any questions about award documentation and payment.

## Budgeting

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### *Tips and Tricks*

Understanding your finances and setting a budget for yourself are important steps in preparing for your travels. Creating a budget prior to departure will help you anticipate expenses and stick to your plan. For general budgeting advice, check out our video series on [Budgeting Abroad](#).

Prior to traveling, research online to compare the cost of typical expenses (i.e., food, rent, clothing, water, school supplies) in your host country versus in the United States. Cost of living estimates are crucial in creating a budget that you can stick to. Websites such as [Expatistan](#) and [Numbeo](#) can help you more accurately compare costs.

### *Additional Budgeting Resources*

- [Budgeting Worksheet](#)
- [Mint](#)
- [You Need a Budget](#)

## Cultural Adjustment and Culture Shock

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Integrating yourself into a culture requires active participation. More than likely, you chose a location abroad because it interested you more than any other. Create a list of all the things that interest you most about your host country and use the list items as ways to get involved with your host culture and community.

To help you in adjusting to your host culture and dealing with culture shock, check out the video series on Cultural Adjustment and Culture Shock on the [Pre-Departure Information webpage](#).

## ***Stress Abroad***

Studying or interning overseas, while impactful, can also be a stressful experience. Everyone deals with stress in their own way but using the following tips can be helpful during your time overseas:

- **Make a to-do list:** Visualizing what you need to accomplish will keep you organized and on track to succeed.
- **Be realistic:** Going to another country doesn't mean everything will be perfect, and that's okay! You will likely encounter occasional challenges or frustrations, which is completely normal. Keep in mind you will not be able to see or do everything that your host country has to offer. Although we encourage you to learn as much as possible about the local culture, we also want you to be realistic about the time you have outside of your classes or internship.
- **Reach out:** Do not hesitate to contact your program provider, home/host university advisor, International SOS, your Gilman advisor, or a trusted friend or family member if you are dealing with an issue that you don't know how to address. Remember, all Gilman scholars have access to as many as five free counseling sessions through International SOS, which can help guide you through challenging times.
- **Maintain your regular habits:** Maintaining habits that relax you can help relieve stress. This could include keeping up with hobbies that you enjoy, eating foods that make you happy or are familiar to you, and making time to chat with your best friend from home.

## ***Communicating Across Cultures***

Depending on the location of your program, you might encounter communication styles very different from your own. While abroad, you will make mistakes when

it comes to language and communication. Don't worry! Making an effort to speak the language or communicate in a culturally appropriate manner will go a long way with people in your host country. Understanding the communication style of your host culture can help you communicate effectively in social, academic, and professional settings.

### **High Context Cultures**

High context cultures rely on nonverbal cues to convey meaning. Body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and eye movement can sometimes relay more information than what a person says. Because high context cultures prioritize relationships and group dynamics formed over time, meaning is often implicit; insiders in the group can easily determine context because of their longstanding relationships.

It can be difficult for outsiders to adapt to a high context culture because they do not carry the context information necessary for understanding. Being aware of the differences between a high context and a low context culture can be a great first step toward adapting to your host culture.

In a high context culture, begin academic or professional meetings with small talk. Diving directly into the objective of the meeting can ignore the importance of building the relationship. Also, gift-giving is an important aspect of many high context cultures. If traveling to a country with a high context culture, it can be a nice gesture to bring gifts from home (i.e., recipes, magnets, key chains) for your host family, professors, and contacts that you'll meet during your time abroad.

**Characteristics:** relational, collectivistic, intuitive, and contemplative

**Communication style:** indirect, flowery language, humble, non-verbal

**Work style:** team- and relational-oriented

**Friendships:** comparatively few, close, long-term

**Examples:** Argentina, Brazil, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Korea, Morocco, Tanzania; most African, Arab, East Asian, and South American countries are high context cultures

### Low Context Cultures

A low context culture is one where communication is clear and straightforward. What you say is what you mean! It is typically easier for Americans to adapt to a low context culture than to a high context culture, as Americans are known abroad as being very direct. Communicators in a low context culture are explicit, with less reliance on the meaning of a single word.

Low context cultures are often diverse and celebrate individual differences. Because of this diversity within the culture and the fact that not everyone is drawing from the same shared experience, it is important to communicate clearly to be understood.

**Characteristics:** logical, linear, individualistic, action-oriented

**Communication style:** direct, straightforward, concise, explicit, verbal

**Work style:** task-oriented, individualistic

**Friendships:** comparatively many, loose, short-term

**Examples:** Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Scandinavia, United Kingdom, United States

## Making the Most of Your Experience

### *Think Local*

Before you travel, think about ways to make this opportunity an enriching cultural and language exchange. Keep an open mind, be respectful of differences, and above all, be adaptable.

Once abroad, keep these tips in mind to get the most out of your experience:

- Try to befriend the local people instead of hanging out only with other students or interns from your program. Ask local people where they go for entertainment and join them.
- Participate in host university and community activities. If you practice a hobby or a sport in the United States, finding a way to do that activity in your host country can be a great way to meet locals.
- Try to engage a wide variety of people. Ask questions and listen. Remind yourself that you have your own cultural biases that might cloud your understanding of a comment or situation. If you have questions about conversations or situations that you experience, find a cultural informant such as program staff, your host family, and friends you make during your time abroad.
- Avoid intense debates, especially when it concerns delicate topics such as religion and politics.

### *Being a Cultural Ambassador*

Source: *Being a Good Representative*. Grand Valley State University Study Abroad. June 5, 2014. <https://www.gvsu.edu/studyabroad/being-a-good-representative-602.htm>.



While you are abroad, you are a citizen ambassador representing the United States, the Gilman Program, and your home institution. It is important to be respectful at all times.

Be a good student or intern. Attend all classes, arrive on time or early to your internship, do your homework and other tasks carefully and diligently, and show respect to your professors, coworkers, and fellow students.

Avoid expressing negative opinions or generalizations about the host country. Try not to pass value judgments on things that are different from your life in the United States. Remember that you are a guest in someone's home, school/workplace, and country. Be respectful and courteous.

For more information about being a good representative of the United States while abroad, refer to the Glimpse Foundation's guide on [American Identity Abroad](#).

### **Personal Goal Setting**

To truly reap the rewards of your abroad experience, you should set personal, professional, and academic goals before your departure. Setting goals and revisiting them on a regular basis can help you make the most of your time abroad. Visit the Goal Setting section in your Gilman portal (in the Abroad tab) to track your progress.

Think about how you can make your goals specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART). The following list provides ideas to get you started:

- Introduce yourself to one new local person each week
- Obtain an internship or volunteer position in your host city
- Learn more about your chosen career path through the lens of your host country



- Increase your proficiency in a foreign language from Novice High to Intermediate High on the [ACTFL Proficiency Scale](#)

Consider the following guiding questions when setting your goals:

- Pre-Departure
  - » What goals do you have for your time abroad?
  - » What can you do while abroad to integrate yourself more fully into your host community?
- On Program:
  - » Review the goals that you set for yourself prior to departure. How are you doing so far on your goals? Is there anything that needs to be modified for you to meet your goals before the end of your experience?
  - » So far, how have you engaged with your host community? Are there ways you can engage more deeply?
- Post Program:
  - » Did you accomplish your goals? If so, how will those accomplishments affect your future academic or career trajectory?
  - » Do you have any advice for students going abroad? If so, how do you plan to integrate that into your Follow-On Service Project?

## Identity Abroad

### *How Will Your Identity Affect Your Experience?*

Everyone comes to the abroad experience with a range of identities, from how you identify racially or ethnically to your sexuality and gender identity to your religion or lack thereof. It is important to take time to consider how your identities might influence your experience abroad, including the lens through which you view your host environment and the way you are perceived by others.

We encourage you to explore the experiences of other Americans with a shared identity in your host country. Contact your program staff, home institution, or Gilman advisor to get connected with alumni and ask questions of peers.

The following list highlights resources to help you navigate your identity and the abroad experience. If you have specific concerns about your identity in your host country, discuss them with your host program, home school, and Gilman advisor to determine the best method to prepare yourself for your time abroad:

- [Navigating Identity & Diversity Abroad \(IES Abroad\)](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion Abroad Guide \(Diversity Abroad\)](#)
- [The Influence of Study Abroad on Identity \(University of South Carolina\)](#)

### *Identity Wheel*

Source: *Diversity Wheel*. Johns Hopkins University Diversity Leadership Council. [http://web.jhu.edu/dlc/resources/diversity\\_wheel/](http://web.jhu.edu/dlc/resources/diversity_wheel/).

You are the result of the intersection of all your different identities. On the following wheel are some of the identities that make you who you are. The inner circle



represents characteristics that are more permanent and visible. The outer circle represents characteristics that will change throughout your lifetime.

Activity: Consider your identity in terms of each of the slices on the wheel. Prior to traveling abroad, take a moment to reflect on your identity by considering the following questions:

- Which aspect of your identity do you think people first notice about you?
- Which identities do you think about most often?
- Which identity do you think will have the biggest impact on your experience abroad?
- Do you expect that any of your identities will change over the course of your experience abroad? If so, which one(s)?



## Health and Safety Abroad

### General Tips

Source: Berdan, S.N., Goodman, A., Taylor, C. *A Student Guide to Study Abroad*. Institute of International Education. 2013.

If you encounter a situation that affects your health and safety, remember the following:

- Use your resources. Communicate with your program or host institution/organization.
- Know how to contact emergency services or police in your host country. What is the equivalent of “9-1-1” where you are studying?
- Communicate with your home institution. Many institutions offer campus services to students while abroad and upon return to the United States.
- Review the information provided by the U.S. Department of State:
  - » [Traveler Information: U.S. Students Abroad](#)
  - » [Country Information](#)
  - » [U.S. Embassies Abroad](#)
  - » [Emergencies Abroad](#)
  - » [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)
- Connect with [International SOS](#) for advice, referrals, and information about your specific location.
- Respond immediately to all communications from International SOS and the Gilman Program if there is a security concern in your host country.
- Make copies of all your travel documents and your itinerary. Leave one copy with family/friends at home and store the other in a safe place, separate from the originals. Having a copy of your documents is helpful if the originals are lost or stolen.
- While abroad, you are subject to the laws of your host country. Comply with all local laws and do your research before you travel.
- Always carry your international health insurance card

and understand what your provider does and does not cover. Know the procedure for making a claim.

- Be sure to pack enough prescription medications (as applicable) for your entire trip. Carry the medication in original-labeled containers and bring a letter from your doctor in case of any restrictions on transport of prescription medication.
- Refer to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for vaccinations required for travel to your host country.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and your belongings. Don’t carry large amounts of cash and store your money and important documents in several places.

### International SOS

To keep you safe and healthy while you are traveling on your program abroad, the Gilman Program has partnered with [International SOS](#), the world’s leading medical and travel security services company. Please review our [Safety & Health Support](#) webpage or watch [this quick video](#) for more details on International SOS. You’ll need your membership ID, which can be found in your Gilman portal, to access services with International SOS.

Create your one-time MyTrip profile through the dedicated [Gilman portal URL](#). Once your profile is set up, manually enter your flight information into your account OR forward your flight booking(s) to [ExchangeTravel@itinerary.internationalsos.com](mailto:ExchangeTravel@itinerary.internationalsos.com).



For quick access to services, download the [International SOS Assistance App](#):



- One-click dialing to the closest International SOS Assistance Center
- Mobile-friendly medical and travel security information
- The latest medical and travel security alerts
- Favorite country content for navigation to the most relevant information for you
- 24/7 live chat with International SOS support staff

## Practical Advice for International Travelers

### *Packing for Long-Term Travels*

Before you start packing your suitcase, there are a few considerations to keep in mind:

- How long will you be abroad? Will you need to pack for multiple seasons?
- What is your host environment like? Will there be stores for you to buy things on arrival, or will you need to bring everything with you?
- Are there any cultural expectations about dressing conservatively?
- Does your program/host institution provide sheets and towels?
- Can you buy your toiletries in your host country? Some items, like feminine hygiene products or solid deodorant, can be difficult to find overseas depending on the country.

Pack as light as possible, remembering that you'll want to have room in your return luggage for souvenirs and gifts! A good way to test yourself is to try to carry all your bags up one flight of stairs at once. If it's not manageable at home, it'll be difficult for you to maneuver it through a large international airport. To avoid any last-minute fees, check the airline's website to make sure that you're complying with baggage size and weight restrictions.

Check out our suggested packing list!

### Carry-On Luggage

Passport and visas (plus copies)  
Additional photo ID (plus copies)  
Plane tickets  
International health insurance card  
International SOS membership card  
Credit/debit cards  
Local currency (enough to cover a meal, airport transportation, and any emergency expenses)  
Laptop and charger  
Cell phone and charger  
Headphones  
Change of clothes  
Travel size toiletries and toothbrush  
Prescription medication  
Glasses/contact lenses  
Sunglasses  
Umbrella  
Empty reusable water bottle

### Clothing

7-8 core outfits (comfortable, durable clothing that can be worn with multiple outfits)  
1 pair pajamas  
1 set workout clothes  
1 nice outfit for formal occasions  
2 weeks' worth of underwear  
7-8 pairs socks  
1 pair flip-flops  
1 pair comfortable walking shoes  
1 pair sneakers  
1-2 belts  
Light jacket or raincoat  
Swimsuit (if necessary)  
Winter coat (if necessary)  
Cold weather gear: hat, gloves, scarf (if necessary)  
Small backpack/purse

## Toiletries

Shampoo/conditioner  
Brush/comb  
Toothbrush  
Toothpaste  
Dental floss  
Soap  
Deodorant  
Feminine products  
Razors/shaving cream  
Nail clippers  
Makeup  
Skin care products

## Extras

Gifts  
Pens and pencils  
Notebook  
Journal  
Adapters

### What NOT to bring:

- Too many shoes or clothes. Wear comfortable, neutral-colored clothing that you can layer. You'll probably want to shop while you're abroad, so don't over-pack!
- Books. They're heavy and take up lots of room in your suitcase. Bring an e-reader or check with your local public library about borrowing books on a cell phone app.
- Bulky electronics. Your hair straightener, curling iron, or blow dryer will likely not be adaptable with outlets overseas. Buying these abroad can save room in your suitcase.

## Cell Phones Abroad

Most smart phones will function overseas. However, there are a few things to think about before you travel. Being proactive about your plan for communicating with friends and family back home can help you avoid any unexpected data charges and roaming fees. Here are a few options for using your cell phone overseas:

1. **Turn off cellular data and use WiFi.** When your cellular data is turned off, most functions on your device will work only when you are connected to the internet. To turn off data, go to your device's settings or simply put the device in airplane mode. You can use free apps such as Facebook Messenger, FaceTime, Google Voice, Signal, Skype, and WhatsApp to communicate while connected to the internet. Before you leave, check that you'll have WiFi on your program while at home and at school or work.
2. **Purchase a local phone for calls and texts.** After arriving overseas, you can purchase an inexpensive ("non-smart") phone and pay for minutes as you go. This can be useful for communicating with program staff, making dinner reservations, or calling a taxi. Then, turn off cellular data on your smartphone to access all your apps when connected to WiFi.
3. **Use a local SIM card or eSIM in your phone.** If your phone is unlocked, you can purchase a local SIM card or eSIM and insert it into your phone. Some newer phone models do not use a physical SIM card and use an eSIM instead. An eSIM is a digital SIM that allows you to activate a mobile data plan from your network provider without having to use a physical nano-SIM. You can then pay for calls, texts, and data as you go. Keep in mind that if your phone is not unlocked, you will not be able to change the SIM card or eSIM. Check with your cell phone company to see if your phone is unlocked, and if not, ask if they can unlock it for you. See [this page](#) for a list of carriers that offer eSIM services.



#### 4. Check with your provider for international plans.

Ask your cell phone carrier if they offer short-term international data packages. These plans are typically more expensive than your domestic phone plan but are an option worth exploring. If you are a T-Mobile customer, several of the company's plans have free unlimited international texting and data.

### Accessing Money Overseas

First, do your research! Find out if debit/credit cards are widely accepted in your host country or if you will need to use cash for most purchases.

Plan to bring your ATM or debit card with you to withdraw local currency. You will likely be charged a fee (\$3-\$5 USD) from both your bank and the foreign ATM every time you withdraw funds. Therefore, to minimize ATM fees, minimize the number of times you withdraw money. Withdraw enough money to last you several weeks and store it in a few safe places.

Be wary of using your credit card abroad, as many banks charge a foreign transaction fee for every use of the card. Check with your bank to learn about any foreign transaction fees. In addition, let your bank know where and when you'll be traveling to avoid a suspected fraud hold on your account.

Finally, visit your bank to get foreign currency before you travel. Most banks offer foreign currency; if you pick it up in person instead of having it delivered, you can usually obtain it without paying additional fees.

## Staying Connected with Gilman

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### Social Media

- Join the [Gilman Scholars & Alumni Facebook Group](#)
- Join the [Gilman Scholar Network](#) (after your documents are approved)
- Join the Gilman Alumni [LinkedIn](#) Group
- Follow Gilman's [Instagram](#) @gilmanscholarship
  - » Tag your photos with [#GilmanScholarship](#)
  - » Check out Gilman's IGTV!
- Follow us on [Twitter](#) @Gilman Program

### Photo Submissions

We love to see the amazing adventures you're having abroad and often feature Gilman scholars participating in cultural and academic activities around the world. Please review our [photo submission guidelines](#) and send your best pictures to [gilmanphotos@iie.org](mailto:gilmanphotos@iie.org). We might feature your photos on our website or social media!

## Gilman Program Opportunities Abroad

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### Special Invitations

As a Gilman scholar abroad, you may receive invitations to events hosted by U.S. Embassies, Consulates, EducationUSA advising centers, or Fulbright Commissions. We encourage you to attend! These are wonderful opportunities to meet new people in your host country and build your professional network. Even if you are not able to attend, please respond to any invitation you receive as a courtesy.



## Events and Study Tours

Gilman scholars may be invited to apply for additional opportunities, such as workshops or study tours.

**Special events and opportunities are limited and vary by location and term. Be sure to keep an eye on your email and newsletters for anything that might be happening in your country or region.**

## Alternate Follow-On Service Project Opportunities

The Gilman Program offers several opportunities for scholars to participate in alternative Follow-On Service Projects. **If you are selected for and successfully complete** one of these, you will no longer be required to complete your original Follow-On Service Project. However, you will still be expected to complete a report about your experiences to satisfy your post-program requirements. You are welcome to complete your original project as well.

Keep an eye out on the Gilman Program's social media for announcements about alternative Follow-On Service Project opportunities!

Reach the World – The Gilman Scholarship Program and Reach the World (RTW), a global education nonprofit based in New York City, have partnered to offer a select group of candidates the opportunity to share their journeys online through written posts, photos, and video connection with K-12 students in the United States. Since 2009, more than 900 Gilman scholars have volunteered with RTW!

Gilman Influencer Program – The Gilman Influencer Program is an opportunity for active Gilman scholars to document their time studying abroad in the form of short videos during their exchange program. The Creative

individuals who know how to showcase their story through digital media and want to share their experience with the wider Gilman community can apply for this opportunity. Participants will be able to fulfill their Follow-On Service Project requirement through participation.

## Gilman Alumni Community

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Remember that upon completion of your abroad program and Follow-On Service Project, you will join the community of more than 50,000 Gilman alumni across the world! Check out the [Alumni section](#) of our website for information about Non-Competitive Eligibility for federal jobs, networking opportunities exclusive to Gilman alumni, discounts on graduate programs, career development workshops, and much more!

## Contacting Gilman

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Contact the Gilman Program if you have questions or concerns while abroad. Please note our office hours are Monday-Friday from 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, and we are closed on federal holidays. You can contact us through the following phone number and email addresses:

1-800-852-2141, extension 3

Programs in:

- Middle East/North Africa  
[GilmanAfricaMENA@iie.org](mailto:GilmanAfricaMENA@iie.org)
- Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America  
[GilmanWH@iie.org](mailto:GilmanWH@iie.org)
- East Asia and the Pacific  
[GilmanEAsiaPacific@iie.org](mailto:GilmanEAsiaPacific@iie.org)
- Europe and Eurasia  
[GilmanEurope@iie.org](mailto:GilmanEurope@iie.org)
- South and Central Asia  
[GilmanSCAsia@iie.org](mailto:GilmanSCAsia@iie.org)



