



FLAG Abroad: Essential Information for Students

Studying abroad is one of the most powerful ways to build global awareness and personal independence, but it is a major commitment that requires careful planning. Participants typically live with host families and attend school in their host country for a trimester, semester, or full academic year. Because this is an immersion experience rather than a simple tour, we want to make sure you and your family are fully prepared for the journey ahead.

Academic Credit and the Role of Your Guidance Counselor

We believe in being completely transparent: FLAG cannot guarantee credit transfer. The decision to accept foreign coursework rests entirely with your U.S. high school. International school systems operate differently than those in the U.S., and host schools are often not obligated to issue official transcripts, particularly for short-term stays. However, our international partners can often provide documents that specify the coursework you completed and confirm your successful participation in the program. We also strongly encourage you to collect syllabi and other evidence of your work while you are abroad to help your case when you return.

Because of this reality, your relationship with your guidance counselor is the single most important factor in ensuring your academic future remains secure. We ask that you sit down with your counselor immediately to build a specific "re-entry plan." This meeting should focus on identifying exactly which core classes you will miss while away and establishing how you will recover those credits—whether through summer school, online courses, or extra semesters—upon your return. This planning ensures you can enjoy your time abroad without worrying about falling behind.

Language Expectations

Our academic programs are immersive and conducted in the host country's language. While many international schools generally look for an "A2" proficiency level—which means basic conversational skills—we do not necessarily require this at the time you apply. We prioritize your attitude over your current test scores.

If you are a high-achieving student with a strong desire to learn, we are happy to consider your application even if you are a beginner, provided you make a firm commitment to reaching that basic A2 level through independent study before departure and continued learning once you arrive. The key to success isn't just what you know before you leave, but how willing you are to speak up, make mistakes, and learn every day you are there. If you are ready to be uncomfortable and grow, you are ready for this program; however, if you have a paralyzing fear of failure or are unwilling to push

through the awkwardness of learning a new language, this experience is likely not for you.

Maturity and Adaptability

This program is designed for students who are already managing their lives successfully. It is important to understand that study abroad is an amplifier, not a fix. The stress of adapting to a new culture, language, and school system removes a student's familiar support network (parents, friends, and routines), which typically exacerbates, rather than resolves, existing emotional or behavioral challenges.

To succeed, students must already demonstrate the resilience to navigate ambiguity and stress. We strongly advise that applicants be in a place of emotional stability and mental wellness for at least one year prior to departure to ensure they can handle the rigors of the exchange safely.

Program Costs and Financial Planning

Investing in a study abroad experience is an investment in your future college and career potential. Academic programs generally range from **\$5,000 to \$15,000+**, depending on the destination and length of stay. These fees cover your host family placement, meals with the family, insurance, orientation, and support services.

Please keep in mind that airfare, passport fees, and personal spending money are not included and should be factored into your family's budget. We encourage families to view this as they would private tuition or other high-level educational investments.

Travel Documents and Health

Every student requires a valid passport that must remain active for at least six months beyond your planned return date to avoid being denied boarding. We have strategically designed our current programs to minimize bureaucratic hurdles; because our itineraries in Italy, France, Spain, and Japan are short-term, U.S. citizens do not currently need to obtain a visa before departure. However, travelers to any European destination must now obtain an ETIAS travel authorization online before flying. This is a mandatory security screening, separate from a visa. While Germany remains unique in allowing students to handle other residency paperwork after arrival, you still need the ETIAS simply to board the flight.

Regarding health, you will need medical clearance from a physician to participate. We also strongly recommend reviewing local regulations regarding vaccinations and prescriptions. Not all medications prescribed in the U.S.—especially certain ADHD or anti-anxiety drugs—are legal in Japan or Europe. It is your responsibility to ensure you are compliant with local laws to avoid significant issues at customs.

Short-Term Summer Programs

If a full semester feels like too much, we strongly recommend our summer programs. These typically run between **\$3,000 and \$5,000** and focus on cultural immersion in a single community rather than rapid-fire tourism. They are an excellent, cost-effective

way to see the world without interrupting your U.S. schooling, and they generally have no strict language requirements.

Planning Timeline

The earlier you start, the better. We suggest researching programs and meeting with your counselor about 9 to 12 months in advance. You should aim to complete your applications and gather your documents 6 to 9 months before departure. By the 3 to 6-month mark, you will be finalizing your placement and securing your passport. Finally, in the last few months, you will have an orientation, connect with your host family, and pack your bags for the experience of a lifetime.

We're excited to talk more with you about our programs.
Contact outbound@flag-intl.org or visit www.flag-intl.org/abroad.html to learn more!

