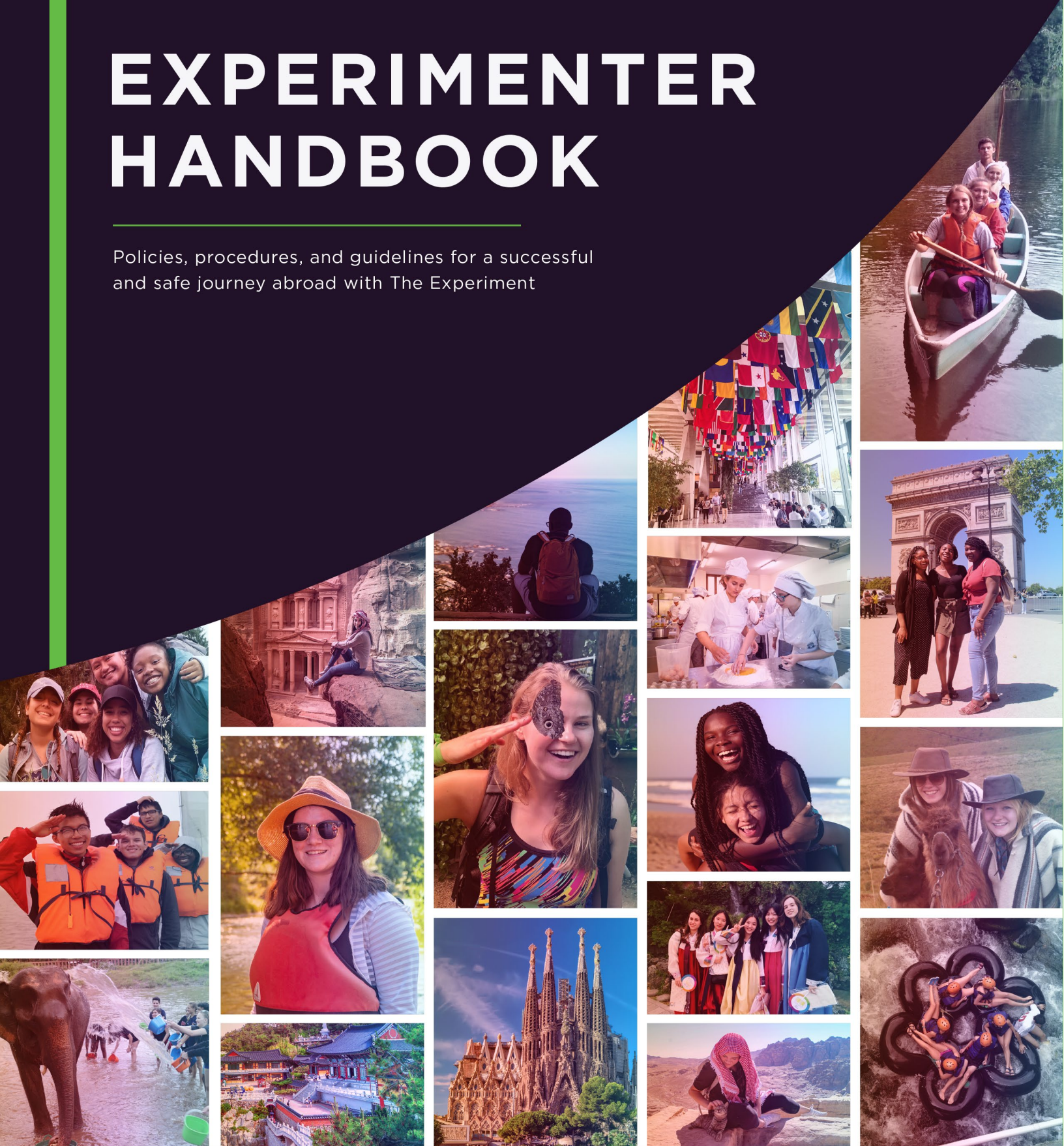




The
EXPERIMENT
in International Living

EXPERIMENTER HANDBOOK

Policies, procedures, and guidelines for a successful and safe journey abroad with The Experiment



Welcome To The Experiment Family

Congratulations, and welcome to The Experiment family! Your experience with The Experiment is going to be an extraordinary time, filled with profound challenges, inspiration, joy, powerful moments, travel, adventure, deep friendships, and so much more. By deciding to explore another cultural context firsthand, you have demonstrated your willingness to step outside of your comfort zone. The Experiment staff and thousands of past Experimenters applaud your decision! We hope you share our excitement as you join a group of young people from all over the United States and the world. Together, you will embark on a shared journey that encompasses the challenges, beauty, and differences of life in another country.

This handbook is a tool to help you and your family prepare for your Experiment summer. The first part of the handbook includes general information about the Experiment, our groups, and our leaders. The second, and largest section, is really a guidebook and toolkit to help you reflect, imagine, and lay the groundwork for your learning and growth this summer. It's a mix of useful information, things to consider, and activities that will help you prepare for your Experiment experience, including when you return home. To be clear, none of the activities in this book are "homework" or required. They are resources for you to explore as you prepare for your program. The final section in this handbook connects you to the guidelines and policies. It is important that you and the adults in your life review these carefully and together. The guidelines and policies help you and your family know what is expected and how we can all work together to make your summer a safe, learning experience.

In joining The Experiment family, you are joining an extensive educational and professional community which you can also learn more about in this handbook.

Welcome to The Experiment, we are excited to have you with us.

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1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676

Brattleboro, VT 05302

800.345.2929

802.251.1700 (on-call assistance during programs)

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ABOUT THE EXPERIMENT

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For more than 90 years, The Experiment in International Living has been the pioneer in cross-cultural education for young people. Experiment programs introduce students to critical local and global issues through homestays, language training, community service/internship, regional exploration, and the arts. Our group leaders facilitate substantive immersion programs by collaborating with experienced in-country educators, faculty, language trainers, artists, thematic experts, and chefs.

In preparing for your Experiment program, it is important to recognize that you will be participating in neither a highly structured tour-based trip nor a traditional, strict classroom-based academic experience. Instead, you will be involved in a program that will ask you to develop a deep understanding of and connection to the people and culture of the host communities and that will challenge you to build the confidence, skills, and abilities necessary to connect and engage on this level. Experiment alumni emphasize that you will get the most out of your experience if you approach the summer with an open mind, patience, and enthusiasm.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Almost all The Experiment programs follow the same four-part program structure: orientation, homestay, thematic exploration or excursion, and reflection. With this structure your travel, group, and learning experiences are organized so that you are prepared for each next step of the journey. We'll go over each of these components in the next section of the handbook, but here is a brief overview. Your orientation helps you learn what to expect on the program, cultural norms, and guidelines, you may start language learning and you will certainly spend time getting to know your group and talking about your "group culture." Then you will either begin your thematic excursion or your excursion, or move into your homestay. Before your homestay you will have another orientation to answer any questions you might have, to set personal goals, and share your hopes and apprehensions before this immersive and rewarding experience. During your homestay, you might see your group every day or you might go a whole weekend spending time with your host family. You will know how to reach your group leaders if you need to. In section two we give some advice for how to prepare for the homestay. On your excursion you will dive into your program's theme. Site visits, community service/internship, classes, and travel are all part of your excursion. This is your chance to further explore the country you are in and learn deeply about a topic of interest. Your program will wrap up with a re-entry and reflection time. This may be one day or a few days depending on your program. During this time, you will think about how you have changed and what you have learned. You'll think back on highlights and favorite moments, and you will imagine how you will take everything you have experienced back home with you.

EXPERIMENT GROUPS

Experiment programs are intentionally designed to be a collective group experience; this group environment is a significant part of Experimenters' learning and growth. Each Experiment group develops its own identity throughout the course of the program. During Experiment programs, your group and group leaders usually become like family, sharing in the joys and bonding over the challenges of your summer abroad.

Experiment groups promote an atmosphere of collective care, respect and understanding, experiential learning, and growth. Just as you are introduced to the diversity of your host communities through homestays and excursions, you will also learn an incredible amount about the diversity within your home communities from your fellow Experimenters. Interestingly, many Experimenters learn as much about their home context as they do about the local communities they are visiting.

Your fellow Experimenters will be from diverse geographic, socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. While the size of each Experiment group varies, the average group consists of 14 Experimenters and two adult group leaders that travel with you. Your group is matched with leaders selected specifically for your program because of their knowledge, skills, and experience.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT 2023 EXPERIMENT GROUPS

- 187 Experimenters traveled to four continents.
- Experimenters came from 27 U.S. states, the District of Columbia and 5 countries, including Ethiopia, France, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and U.S.
- We awarded \$873,000 in need-based scholarships.
- We collaborated with 40+ sponsoring organizations & sending schools that nominated participants.
- Experimenters are of different races, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, gender identities, and varying geographic locations.

In 2023, 42 percent of Experimenters self-identified as participants of color on their applications for admissions.

- Experimenters studied the following languages in school: French, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, German, Italian, Arabic, American Sign Language (ASL), and Latin.
- Experimenters played more than 8 sports and more than 6 types of musical instruments and were involved in over 82 student clubs and activities.
- Experimenters attended a wide range of both public and private schools. Groups contained between 14 and 16 students. The average group size was 15.
- Experimenters lived with 164 different homestay families.
- Experimenters and Experiment group leaders contributed more than 100 hours of community service.

GROUP LEADERS

Experiment group leaders are your number one resource. Group leaders are trained, adult educators who represent our diverse student body and who are skilled in creating inclusive group environments for their participants.

Our group leaders are dedicated to youth development and are passionate about working directly with young people. The Experiment's group leaders:

- Are professional, flexible, resilient, resourceful, pro-active, caring, warm, friendly, and love to laugh
- Genuinely enjoy spending time with high school students
- Have strong organizational and logistical skills, and can manage a budget
- Are willing to put their participants' learning and development ahead of their own experience.
- Are ready for an intense, challenging, and rewarding summer.
- Demonstrate skills and experience in cross-cultural sensitivity and communication.
- Bring a wide variety of backgrounds and social identities.
- Are aware of and committed to addressing bias, systemic inequalities, power, privilege, and oppression.
- Are, above all, educators and facilitators.

If you have questions, concerns, need medical care, want to share a victory, are feeling homesick, or are excited about something, they are the first place you should turn. They are your leader, your advocate, your coach, and your support on this journey.

Before departure, your leaders will participate in a week-long training that prepares them to implement successful programs. On program, your leaders will keep in close contact with our in-country partners, communicate with the U.S. Experiment office, conduct group excursions, guide your group through discussions of your experiences, respond to emergency situations, and support group dynamics.

Your group leaders will do their best to maximize the well-being of all Experimenters, so your group will have a meaningful and memorable learning experience. Throughout the program, your leaders work with you to increase your knowledge of your host country and culture; develop your communication skills; cultivate new attitudes and awareness; and explore the program theme. At the end of the program, your leaders will help you to evaluate your experiences and consider how you can integrate what you learned about yourself and the world into your lives moving forward.

PREPARING FOR YOUR EXPERIMENT EXPERIENCE

PREPARING FOR YOUR EXPERIMENT EXPERIENCE

It is important that you and your family review your program's pre-departure materials on The Experiment [Planning Documents](#) page to help you prepare for your travel.

THE EXPERIMENT PLANNING DOCUMENTS OVERVIEW

Your program's Planning Documents provide a holistic view of travel preparation and include the following:

1. The Experimenter Handbook
2. The Experiment Family Handbook
3. Domestic Travel Planning Guidelines with International Flight Information
4. Health Guidelines
5. Packing List
6. Personal Funds Abroad
7. The Experiment Guide to Traveling with Allergies/Intolerances
8. The Experiment Guide to Travel Vaccinations & Medications
9. Accessing International SOS Member Portal

Handbooks

Like this Experimenter Handbook, The Experiment Family Handbook is a tool to help your parent/caregiver support you in the preparation of, during, and after your return from your experience abroad.

Domestic Travel Planning Guidelines with International Flight Information

This document consists of your international flight itinerary and international ticket restrictions, domestic flight reservation guidelines, luggage guidelines, and information about meeting your group at the airport.

Health Guidelines

Following U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this document is designed to inform you of health risks and concerns present in your local program. The Health Guidelines also provide general preventative measures, health and wellness tips and program-specific vaccination requirements and recommendations.

Packing List

This document has information detailing packing guidelines, such as recommended clothing and gear; prescriptions and medications; valuables and electronics; and gifts for your program's local community/homestay family.

Personal Funds Abroad

This document includes information to prepare you for accessing money while abroad, highlighting recommendations, tips, and frequently asked questions.

The Experiment Guide to Traveling with Allergies/Intolerances

This guide provides context and framework for successful management of allergies and intolerances on an Experiment program.

The Experiment Guide to Travel Vaccinations & Medications

This guide addresses some of the most common travel vaccination and medication questions and lays out considerations for you and your family to discuss with your primary care or travel clinic provider.

Accessing International SOS Member Portal

The Experiment partners with International SOS (iSOS) to provide medical support and security assistance coverage for all Experiment programs abroad. All Experimenters and Experiment families have access to their extensive country-specific resources and this quick guide shows you how to access International SOS's member zone website.

[Access the Planning Documents page by clicking here.](#)

A Note on Managing Your Belongings

Your actions, their impacts, and personal responsibility are magnified in group environments. On your Experiment program, you will be completely responsible for managing your belongings and packing your bags as you move from place. You will be moving between multiple locations throughout your Experiment program (e.g. orientation, homestay, excursions) and will thus be packing and unpacking your bag multiple times. Your host family—particularly younger host siblings—may be curious about your luggage and belongings.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- Have I ever lived in a shared space before?
- Am I someone very organized or who tends to misplace things? How will this impact my group? Where can I support my fellow Experimenters and where might I need some help?
- Have I ever been completely responsible for my belongings while traveling before?
- Do I own anything that I would be sad about for more than one day it was lost or broken? Leave that thing at home.
- What do I really need?
- Could I run to catch a train by myself with my fully packed luggage? If the answer is no, you have packed too much! You should consider what you can leave at home.

THINGS TO DO

- Carry with you only what you need. This applies both to packing at home for the whole trip and packing day- to-day for excursions to museums, schools, etc. Bring a small daypack for short excursions.
- Create a personal packing list based on your program packing list at home. List the specific items you will be bringing and create multiple copies of the list to bring along multiple times you will need to re-pack on program.
- Assign crucial items (e.g. passport, medications, glasses, etc.) to specific locations in your bag and always repack them in that location.
- Practice packing and unpacking your bag.
- Practice living out of your bag for a few days at home.

TRAVEL

All Experiment programs officially begin and end at a specific airport. On the day of departure, you will be responsible for getting to your group's meeting place five (5) hours before the scheduled departure of the group's international flight. This is necessary because flights are often delayed, and it can take time to move about the airport. When everyone is present, you will check in as a group with your group leaders, who hold your international ticket. The program officially ends when the group returns to their gateway airport in the U.S. Upon your return to the U.S., please allow four (4) hours between your international arrival and your domestic departure. It will be your responsibility to make arrangements beyond this point and you will no longer be traveling with your group leaders.

Details on your specific program can be found in The Planning Documents page: Domestic Travel Planning Guidelines with International Flight Information.

Programs to the following locations may begin and end at the following airports:

- Europe and Africa: John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport or Newark Liberty International Airport (New York City area) or Philadelphia International Airport in Philadelphia, PA
- Latin America: Miami International Airport
- Asia and the Pacific: Los Angeles International Airport or San Francisco International Airport

Any costs associated with transportation to airports where the program begins are your responsibility. Don't forget to include meals/snacks, ground transportation, and hotel if necessary.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- International travel, especially for the first time, can be understandably daunting.
- The Experiment Team can support you throughout your travel experience, on-call as you go to the group meeting location (call 1-802-258-3481) and through the Group Leaders once you join the group.
- Careful preparation on your part will make your travel go smoothly and help us support you quickly and efficiently if you need it.

THINGS TO DO

- Make a travel-day checklist to account for all the things you need to do that day and all the documents you need to carry.
- Leave copies of all travel documents (e.g. passport, visa, vaccination certificates, etc.) at home in case of loss or other problems.
- Program The Experiment on-call number (1-802-258-3481) into your phone and write it on a slip of paper which you keep with your passport or wallet. Be sure that your family has this number as well.
- Practice with your luggage and carry-on to determine the best way of accessing the travel documents you will need to display in the airport easily.
- Review the layouts of any domestic airports you will be transiting to familiarize yourself with routes you will need to take.

PERSONAL FINANCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Spending Money

Make your decision regarding how much spending money to bring based on the following: the economy of the country of your program, the length of your program, and, ultimately, your personal spending ability.

Discuss with your family and plan after reviewing your program's Personal Funds document for recommendations, tips, advice and frequently asked questions.

Personal Finance

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Your Experiment program covers all the necessities of food and accommodation. Proactive communication with your bank is the best way to prepare for smooth experiences with a debit card abroad. Your trip is several weeks in length and involves multiple destinations! Bear this in mind when you budget and when you are spending. Personal finances are personal. Be aware that financial availability and accessibility will be different for every member of your Experiment group. Keep this in mind and be considerate, not only when discussing funds, but also when spending them.

THINGS TO DO

- Consult the Personal Funds Abroad document for your program listed on [The Experiment Planning Documents website](#)
- Contact your bank to set up a debit card for your trip or to place a travel notice on any accounts you will be using while abroad.
- Practice using a money belt.
- Do not carry large amounts of cash while on program

ACTIVITIES

- Have a family discussion around personal finances and create a budget plan for your trip. What do the adults in your life expect from you around money on this trip? What are your family values around money? Ask them to help you set realistic expectations, and a budget. Research how much typical items like snacks and souvenirs are likely to cost in your host country.
- You may want to bring gifts or souvenirs or gifts back for family and friends, consider what would be meaningful to the people in your life so you are not tempted to by the first items you see in a local market. Make a list of the most important people you may want to bring a gift back to and what they would appreciate.
- Research exchange rates to get a sense of how much local currency you should expect to receive. Research the denominations of currency in your host country to get a sense of what bills or coins you should be getting as change when you make a transaction. What does the money look like? Is it mostly coins or bills? What color is it? Who is on the currency? Find out the answers to the following questions:
 - The name of the money where I am going is_____.
 - One U.S. dollar equals___in the host country.
 - Twenty U.S. dollars equals_____in the host country.
 - Now, come up with a way for you to figure out the conversion if you don't have a calculator handy.
 - Practice budgeting and monitoring how much you spend (and on what) in your daily life at home.

Communication

We often tell Experimenters that each time we call home or log into social media it's as if you have gotten back on a plane and gone home during that time. We have also found over the years that too much contact with your friends or family back home can increase stress for Experimenters. Of course, we know it is important for you to find time to connect with family and friends back home. In this section we hope to help you and the important people in your life figure out the most realistic and appropriate ways for that to happen.

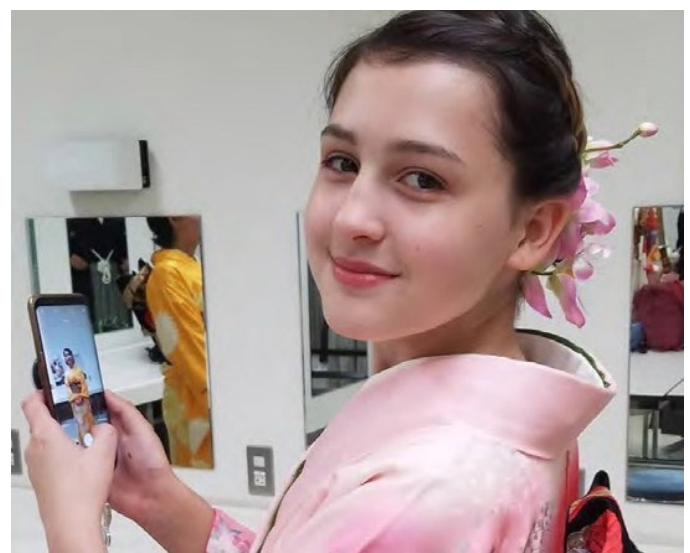
It is very likely that at some point on the trip you will experience homesickness. We also find that if you are struggling with adjustments to the local customs, reminders of home can make things harder. While you are on program, your group leaders and in-country staff are ready and willing to help participants with any problems or issues that come up. If you are feeling homesick reach out to a fellow Experimenter or your group leader. You are part of a community on The Experiment, let them support you in these moments. Your group leaders will understand, they were there too.

We recommend that, before departure, you sit down with your family to discuss the most comfortable and appropriate communication strategy (e.g., by emailing and/or phoning a specific number of times a week). Our recommendation for a reasonable number of calls home is once a week, to accommodate busy schedules and to minimize homesickness.

Please share this with the important people in your life: family and friends should know that orientation and the first few days of program is a very busy time, and it will be difficult for you to find time to call or email home. The Experiment office in Vermont will email each family soon after each group's arrival in the host country.

In addition, some rural excursions do not have access to the internet and there will be areas where cell phone reception is minimal. Expect to communicate less during this period.

In our experience, the best and most reliable way to contact the U.S. while abroad is through web-based communication such as: email, Skype, WhatsApp, iMessage, Facebook Messenger, etc. These tools do not require an international phone plan, simply a Wi-Fi connection, which will be available to you periodically though out the trip. We highly discourage you from purchasing an international cell phone plan. In our experience, international cell phone plans are expensive, unreliable, and phones are likely to be lost or stolen. If you feel it's necessary to have service, you can contact your long- distance phone provider to see if they have an international calling plan.



Communication Technologies

While on your Experiment program, you may or may not have access to communication technologies (smart phone, tablet, etc.,) you use at home and the comfort and connectivity these can provide. Technology like smartphones provide us with a constant source of stimulation and reward and can lead to challenges with impulse control and addictive behaviors. If your program is in a place where Wi-Fi is readily available your ability to be on social media may inhibit your group's dynamic, could make getting to know your host family challenging, and may increase feelings of homesickness. Leaders will sometimes say "We want you to be here while you are here." Constant connectivity to home can truly take you out of your experience.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- When I am feeling excited, stressed, bored, etc. do I automatically reach for my phone to let someone know about it, play games, or browse?
- Am I able to go to sleep at night without your phone close by?
- How important is it for me to be up to date on what friends and family are doing via social media?
- How do I feel when I misplace my phone or do not have service?

THINGS TO DO

- Work with your family to make a communication plan outlining how and how often you will communicate with home. The Experiment Team recommends once a week as a good option.
- Let your friends know you will not be as available or present on social media while you are away.
- Get prints made of special photos of your family and friends from home to share with your host family and fellow Experimenters
- Start wearing a watch or have a time piece that is not your phone. Checking the time is a very easy way to get sucked back into devices. Also, you never know when your battery might die and you are unable to charge it.

ACTIVITIES:

- Start practicing spending some time without your device or social media. Think through your daily schedule, is checking your phone the first thing you do in the morning? Try not looking at it until after you eat breakfast or have a shower. Are you someone who rides a bus or train to school? Try not using your device during that time for a week. Start to increase your time not using the device and decrease your reliance on it. Could you go from 8am to 9pm without using social media? Could you go 24 hours without a phone? What about a week?
 - Pay attention to how you feel while you are not using your device. How does it feel? Did you notice any physical habits around checking your device? Are you more relaxed? Are you more anxious? Some people feel a sense of relief not looking at devices or social media for a while.
 - What else are you doing with that time? Are you finding other ways to connect with people? Have you noticed anything new about yourself, your patterns, or how you interact with people?
 - What is a goal you can set for yourself around devices while you are on program?
- Practice going to bed at night without your phone. Try using this time to think about your day. Consider starting to practice journaling. Journaling is a very useful tool when traveling. It helps you think about the experiences you are having each day and serves as a memory box when you get home. Get used to using a different time piece (watch or travel clock) as an alarm.
- Collect addresses to send postcards or letters. (Everyone loves getting mail with an international stamp on it!)

ON PROGRAM, INVEST IN YOUR GROUP AND IN BEING PRESENT IN THE EXPERIENCE:

- While you will obviously need to keep your phone on hand in case of emergency, do not let your cell phone dominate your Experiment experience. Consider going for periods of time in your host country without using a cell phone, so that you can experience the cultural environment in a meaningful way.
- Bring a camera that isn't your phone or art supplies (e.g. sketching pencils, watercolors, etc.) to capture your memories.
- Write what you would text or post on a post card instead.

Create a group agreement around intentional presence and technology use on program when your group is developing norms.

Where And How to Find Support On Program

As an Experimenter, your wellness and success on program are your responsibility, but you never need to shoulder that responsibility alone. Your group leaders, fellow Experimenters, host families, The Experiment staff, as well as family and mentors at home are all engaged in supporting your experience in different ways. In many ways this handbook is a starting point for your ownership of your wellness and for great conversations with your support network before, during, and after the program.

Remember that Experimenters and families can reach The Experiment Team at 1-800-345-2929 before the program and 1-802-258-3481 during the program. Our Admissions (before program departure) and On-Call (during program) Teams are here to answer your questions and address your concerns. As we have mentioned, and will likely mention again, your group leaders are your first line of support while you are on The Experiment. Your group leaders and the in-country staff will be the closest and best resourced to help you manage the social, emotional, and physical challenges you may encounter.

Proactive Communication

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- The Experiment is best able to support your wellness on program if we have thorough information regarding your physical and mental health, anticipated challenges, and expectations before you depart for program.
- It is easier to change a plan than to make one: Wellness Plans are an appropriate tool for participants and families interested in structuring their approach to participant wellness on program.
- While you are on program, group leaders should be your first point of communication for any concern or question.
- If you call home with a concern while on program before communicating with a Group Leader, families then call staff at The Experiment Office, who in turn call your Group Leader. Help us close this loop by communicating directly with your group leaders as a first step.
- For Experimenters: Your group leaders will set clear expectations for how and when to communicate with them while you are on program (e.g. check-ins with the group, individual check-ins, homestay visits, etc.).
- For Families: While your Experimenter is on program, you will not be able to communicate directly with group leaders; this can be a distraction from the leaders' focus on the group. Please contact The Experiment Team directly at 1-802-258-3481.

THINGS TO DO

- Reach out to The Experiment with any concerns prior to your program. (1-800-345-2929).
- For Experimenters: While on the program, if you are in doubt about anything at all, communicate with your group leaders.

- For Families: While your Experimenter is on program, reach out to The Experiment Team with any updates, questions, or concerns at 1-802-258-3481.

Self-Advocacy

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Only you can know how you feel or what you are experiencing.
- Health concerns and situational challenges are often easiest to address when they are new or small—a great reason to communicate with your group leaders early and often.
- Your host family is also an excellent resource for support, even if communicating your needs across language hurdles and new relationships may seem daunting. Respect and compassion between you and your host family will ultimately result in stronger bonds and a more meaningful homestay experience.
- As part of your Experiment group, your needs are closely connected with the entire group's.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- Are there situations at home or in school in which I communicate my needs or advocate for myself?
- Do I find it easy or challenging to advocate for myself?

The Experiment On-Call Line: +1 802 258 3481 (During Program)

Participants, parents, and group leaders have access to The Experiment's on call line (802-258-3481), which is staffed by our professional team 24 hours per day 7 days per week during programs. Participants should access this phone number should they have any concerns on program that cannot be addressed by a group leader or the in-country partner.

World Learning Confidential Reporting Line

The Experiment and World Learning have a confidential reporting line (contact information below) that participants and group leaders can use during programs. This 1-800 line is confidential and reported incidents are only shared with World Learning senior leadership. Should a member of our team need to know, the senior staff member would alert the most senior member of The Experiment team, who would follow up on the incident appropriately and with sensitivity. The Admissions team will highlight this reporting line during pre-departure orientations and pre-program communications.

Website: www.lighthouse-services.com/worldlearning

English speaking USA and Canada: 833-400-0039

Spanish speaking USA and Canada: 800-216-1288

French speaking Canada: 855-725-0002

Spanish speaking Mexico: 01-800-681-5340

AT&T USADirect

All other countries: 800-603-2869 (must dial country access code first click [here](#) for access codes and dialing instructions)

E-mail: reports@lighthouse-services.com (must include company name with report)

PREPARING TO TRAVEL AND LEARN

PREPARING TO TRAVEL AND LEARN

The Experiment's focus has always been to improve understanding across cultures and expand the worldview of U.S. students. The Experiment remains a leader in intercultural exchange and, with 70,000 alumni, continues to build on its legacy.

The Experiment's Founding Philosophy:

- Go to learn, not to teach.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Turn a crisis into an adventure.
- Learn to live together by living together.
- Be quick to observe, slow to judge.

A NEW WAY TO LEARN

The Experiment Learning Goals:

During your time with the Experiment, we hope that you will:

- Explore a new cultural context through hands-on experience.
- Connect and engage meaningfully with another culture.
- Deepen consciousness toward critical global issues shaping the host communities as well as communities back home.
- Cultivate empathy and harmony across ethnic, religious, and national communities while on the program and back home.
- Develop leadership, teamwork, cross-cultural competence, language acquisition, and communication and problem-solving skills.
- Grow personally to become a confident and accountable leader.

The Experiment's educational philosophy and approach for all our programs is immersive, experiential, and student-centered. The Experiment values learning in community. All programs are meant to nurture your academic and personal growth, prepare you to reflect on and share your experience with others, and draw on the lessons learned during your time as an Experimenter to inform future decisions about your career and values.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is the process of learning by doing. You will have an experience (a conversation, a group activity, cooking a meal with your host family, using public transportation in a new country, etc.) and then you will take a moment to think about what you learned from that experience. There are four steps to experiential learning:

1. **The Experience.** Trying something new, doing an activity, having a conversation, experiencing a moment in time.
2. **Reflection.** You will ask and answer questions like: What happened at that moment? How did that feel? What did I notice? What did that make me think about?
3. **Analysis.** What does this mean? What can I learn from this? What does this make me think about back home? Does this connect to other things I've learned about?
4. **Application.** In this last stage you will consider how you will use the information you've learned from your journey and apply it on the program and in your life back home. How would I like to have that conversation differently? How will this change my interaction with my host family? What more do I want to know about this?

A very simple way to remember this cycle is to ask “What? So what? Now what?” What happened? What does it mean? How will I use this information?

Use the activity below as a “practice round” for experiential learning. Again, your group leaders are trained to support you and your group as you process your Experiment experience.

Take some time now to think about an experience that you had recently that surprised you, then ask yourself these questions:

What: What happened? How did it feel in my mind, in my body? Was I proud, embarrassed, frustrated, joyful?

So what: What does it mean? Why is this important? If I were to do it again, what would I do differently? What can I learn from this experience? Is there a meme, video, quote, poem or metaphor that relates to this?

Now what: What will I do now that I have a new perspective on this? How will I use this information? What is different now than before I started reflecting on this experience? What will I do next time?

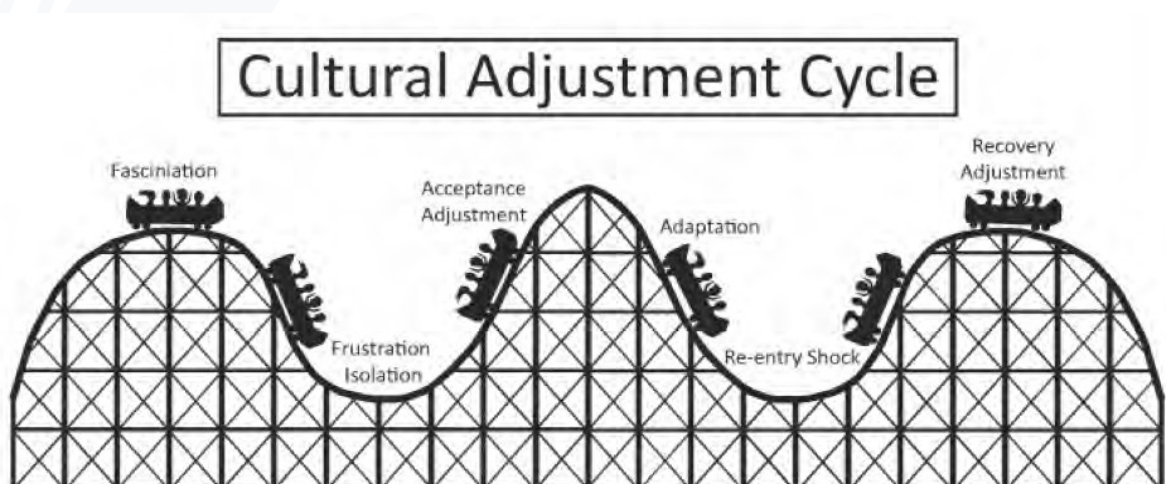
CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

You will soon be immersed in your Experiment program, and you are probably wondering how you will adapt to your new environment. After 90 years of sending Experimenters abroad, we have observed a predictable five-step cultural-adjustment curve that occurs in most cases:

- Initial Excitement – “honeymoon” phase
- Culture Shock – stress of initial adjustment
- Surface Adjustment - coming to terms with differences
- Unresolved Issues - recognizing certain deeper adjustment/integration issues
- Feeling at Home – attaining a level of comfort and acceptance

During the “honeymoon phase,” which usually occurs during orientation, everything is new and exciting. Once the homestay begins, you may experience an initial culture shock. When meeting your host family for the first time and facing cultural differences, you may have questions about how to relate to their new environment. Fortunately, this period is short-lived, and soon you will make a surface adjustment—the unknowns begin to make sense. Generally, this surface adjustment is followed by a slight downward curve where minor challenges with your host family and group may surface. Finally, all the varied emotional ups and downs are replaced by a sense of acceptance and adaptability. You now understand your new culture as just another way of living.

If you are challenged during your program, we encourage you to contact your group leaders for advice, reassurance, or support. We also encourage you to talk to your fellow Experimenters, as they are likely going through similar challenges. Remember, you are not alone.



IDENTITY WHILE ABROAD

Group diversity is a critical component to Experiment programs. You can read more about our approach to diversity, equity and inclusion [here](#).

Experimenters are high school students of different races, religions, sexual orientations, physical abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Experiment actively seeks to engage and enroll participants from a diverse array of backgrounds—from across the U.S. and abroad. Experiment groups represent a range of backgrounds: small towns and large cities; urban and rural areas; and public, private, and home-school educational experiences.

In navigating our varying experiences when traveling or living abroad, it is important to recognize the role of identity in shaping those experiences. Some of the most common social identities include:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Ability
- Religion/spirituality
- Nationality
- Socioeconomic status

Experimenters abroad face a new cultural context that includes different historical and cultural understandings and lenses on social identities. Customs, beliefs, laws, facilities, and social practices are likely different than in your home country. When traveling abroad, the ways you identified yourself in your home country will have a different context in your host country and you may encounter stereotypes, questions, and curiosity surrounding your identities.

Depending on where you go, you may be redefining or shaping what a person from your home country is for some people, so it's wise to prepare yourself for cultural and societal differences around identity. Aspects of your identity that feel salient, or most notable, in your home country may not feel as prominent in other countries or cultures. You may be surprised that in many countries, others perceive your most salient identity to be your national identity as opposed to other identities you hold. Or perhaps your salient identities feel magnified when abroad. Or maybe you will experience a mix of both perceptions. What an individual feels and experiences may be different than how others perceive their identity and what the others doing the perceiving are feeling and experiencing. There are many layers to how you understand your own identity, how you understand others' understanding of your identity, and how others understand or perceive your identity. This section is to help you get started in exploring these areas!

Some Experimenters may have the experience of being in the minority for the first time, whereas others may be a minority in their home country or in different aspects of their identity. Furthermore, some may find themselves as part of the visible majority for the first time, yet their internal experience differs from their outward experience (e.g a Korean American student going to Korea and looking like they are a local). These experiences regarding identity look different for each Experimenter.

Experimenters should consider how they may be perceived in their host country, as their host country may have a different lens or understanding of social identities. Remember that your host country has a different context, culture, and history that we should respect as visitors. Exploring and understanding these differences will lead to greater cultural understanding and exchange.

“Remember that people are people. Your research may have told you about the pervasive attitudes of a region, but it can't tell you about the personal ideologies of the people you will meet. Regardless of a country's policies or social norms, you will always find individual exceptions. Approach each new relationship with no assumptions and you may be pleasantly surprised.” – GoAbroad.com

Preparing and familiarizing yourself with various issues that might impact your experience in your host country will help you to not only more smoothly integrate, but it will also deepen your understanding of your host country. We encourage you to learn as much as possible about the cultural, social, and political landscape in your destination site before you depart and to take advantage of the sample resources below.

To help with culture shock around social identity it is important to prepare yourself. Here are some suggestions on things to do prior to your program:

- Read about the host country's history, culture, laws, and demographics. If reading news articles, commentaries, or blogs, consider the lens through which the information was written
- Make use of online resources that offer advice, personal narratives, and other information for varying identities such as www.diversityabroad.com
- Reflect on your social identities and be open to them shifting and perhaps impacting you when traveling
- Consider the question: "When and how do I prioritize personal safety (physical, emotional, psychological) over cultural sensitivity (fitting in, not ruffling feathers, non-judgmental stances) when it comes to identity while abroad?"
- What barriers might you encounter with your identity and how will you overcome/manage them? How can your group leader support you?

Other Resources:

- [Diversity Abroad](#) offers discussion forums, destination guides, student blogs, and a funding directory to assist students of diverse backgrounds. For instance, explore the [Diversity and Inclusion Guide to Study Abroad](#) to learn more about how your different social identities may be impacted during your experience abroad
- GoAbroad.com created the [Meaningful Travel Tips and Tales: LGBTQ Traveler's Perspectives Book](#)
- [National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange \(NCDE\)](#) is an arm of Mobility International USA and a great resource for students with disabilities who want to study abroad. The website includes a database of disability organizations worldwide, tips for traveling with disabilities, free one-on-one consultations, and informational videos.
- [IAll Abroad](#) provides useful information for African American, LatinX, Native American and Asian/Pacific Islander American students

PRE-DEPARTURE

If you are reading this, you are already winning at pre-departure preparation. Carefully reviewing this handbook, asking yourself the questions, and doing the activities is an excellent way to plan for your Experiment learning journey. At this stage, make sure you are following the packing lists, practicing your language skills, learning to disconnect from your device, and having fun imagining the summer to come. Another excellent way to prepare is to think about why you wanted to come on The Experiment in the first place.

ACTIVITY

Here are some questions for you to think about as you get ready to go abroad. If you plan to keep a journal (which we strongly advise) this would be a great first entry.

- Why do I want to go abroad?
- Imagine you couldn't share a single picture or make a single social media post from your trip, what would you want to capture about your trip?
- What do I hope to learn while I'm on The Experiment? Are there ways I hope I will grow?
- How do I hope I will contribute to my group?
- What makes me the most nervous, and the most excited?
- Go back and read The Experiment learning goals. Is there one of these I really want to focus on this summer?
- What other goals do I have for myself this summer?

During and after the trip you can check back in with these questions and answers. These answers can help you stay grounded and focused on what YOU wanted this summer to be about.

ORIENTATION

As soon as you land you will start exploring the host country and culture through fun, experiential activities. These activities involve meeting and interacting with people who live there and navigating select neighborhoods in small groups. With support and guidance from the leaders, you will start to explore your surroundings; and start experiencing the sights, sounds, and tastes of the country. You will also begin to increase your confidence and cultural knowledge from day one.

Another large focus of the orientation period is getting to know your group. Your group leader will organize activities so that you begin to get comfortable with each other. Your group leaders might also encourage you to consider your own backgrounds and any presumptions, ideas, and values you may be bringing with them as they engage with their host communities and the other members of the group. In the first day or two, your group will establish norms, or guidelines, for your group experience. These norms often come in the form of a "Group Constitution" that you and your group will create together.

ACTIVITY

The questions below will help you prepare to be part of your Experiment group. Any time a group of people are together for a long time, especially when you are traveling, tensions will naturally arise. Tensions are normal, and absolutely expected, it's how we manage these tensions that matter. These questions will ask you to think about group dynamics, and the role you can play in your group's experience. By answering these questions, you will be ready to help your group write its constitution.

Think about a group, team, or club that you have been a part of....

What made that group successful or not so successful? What are challenges that groups can experience? What makes someone a positive participant in a group? What are things that take away from a positive group culture?

Now, think about your role in a group. Think about your friends, or groups you work on school projects with....

Is there a role you typically fall into? Do you like that role? What is great about how you work in a group? What is an area where you could grow in terms of group work?

Finally, consider how do you want to be with your Experiment group this summer?

What do you hope your group will be like? How can you contribute to it being what you hope for?

HOMESTAY

Nothing inspires nervousness in both Experimenters and the adults in your life quite like the homestay. The homestay is often the most rewarding part of your Experiment experience, it is also often the most challenging. These two—the reward and the challenge—go hand in hand. The homestay has been the cornerstone of The Experiment for 90 years. Living with a host family leads to deeply meaningful cultural immersion and allows you to better understand and experience the host country. It is through the homestay that you can transition from visitors of the host country to fully immersed participants.

The group leaders and in-country staff will have an orientation specifically around the homestay. During this orientation you will learn more about what to expect, you might review scenarios to help you prepare, and you will have a chance to ask any questions you might have about the homestay.

It is likely you will experience homesickness during the homestay, you may even find you are “homesick” for your Experiment group. The first few days of the homestay can be challenging as you adjust to a new schedule and family life. You will experience highs and lows during the homestay, this is normal and to be expected. Please know that the group leaders and your fellow Experimenters support you throughout this adjustment process.

Additionally, we have found that less communication with home will help you to adjust and be fully present during the homestay. It also helps to remember that your host family is likely as nervous to meet you as you are to meet them.

Homestay representatives are currently arranging homestay placements. To find the best possible match, these placements often take time. Thus, final placements are not usually confirmed until mid-to-late June. After you have departed for your program, we will send you and the adults in your life the name and address of the host family that you will be staying with during the program.

ACTIVITY

Imagine you have been invited over to a friend’s house for dinner and to stay the night. Maybe this friend has the same cultural identity as you, maybe not, you can decide, but it should be a real person you know, a real friend. Now, imagine walking into their house for the first time. How do you know the answers to the following questions?

- What should you call the adults? First name, last name?
- Do you take your shoes off or keep them on?
- Where do you put your things?
- How are you expected to behave in this house?
- You are hungry, do you wait to be offered food, or is it acceptable to ask for some, or are you expected to know how to help yourself?

Imagine someone you never met before is coming to stay at your house. How would you feel? What questions would you be asking yourself? (Will they like my house? Will they like me? Will they feel comfortable here? How will I know if they need something?) These are the questions and concerns your host family have before you arrive. They want you to like them as much as you want them to like you.

Questions to prepare for homestay:

- How would you want a host sibling to introduce themselves? How would you like to introduce yourself to your family?
- What activities would you like to do with your host family?
- What would you do if the family doesn't immediately initiate an activity? How can you help "break the ice?"
- What activities would you like to share with the family?
- Do you know games you can play that don't need shared language? (tic-tac-toe, chess, connect-the-dots, etc.)

How are you feeling about the homestay in general?

Did you know the answer to all those questions? Likely not. Likely, even in the first five minutes of your friend's house, you will have questions you won't know the answer to. It is very normal when entering someone's home for the first time, to be nervous. How do you find the answers to the questions above? You observe, and you ask.

Observing and asking will be key components to success in your homestay. No one expects you to know the answers.

THEMATIC EXPLORATION

Every Experiment program has a theme. Do you know what your program's theme is? Throughout your trip, you will have site visits, meet with experts on your topic, visit regions or areas of relevance to your theme, and on some programs related to community service. Thematic workshops, discussions, and training are provided throughout the program to provide a foundation for understanding how the theme plays out in a social, economic, political, and cultural context. You will explore and begin to understand the current opportunities and challenges facing the country, through this critical lens.

During the thematic exploration we hope you will:

- Search for and share new information about the country with group members to understand the topic you are learning about.
- Engage with local community organizations by asking questions.
- Take advantage of opportunities to stretch beyond your comfort zone and use courage to try new things or approach something that has been difficult for you.
- Reflect on activities and site visits in order to identify what you have learned.
- Make connections with your own home communities.

REFLECTION AND RE-ENTRY

Remember back to the “A new way to learn” section of this handbook. In that section you learned about experiential learning. Our programs are designed specifically and carefully with that process in mind. This is why you will spend some part of your last days on program in the “Reflection and Re-entry” stage.

ACTIVITY

Copy these questions down and bring them with you. As you get towards the end of your trip, these questions will help you think about your Experiment program and prepare to return home.

Questions to ask yourself as you get ready to go home:

- What was your favorite memory?
- What was your most meaningful memory?
- What was the hardest part about being in a new place?
- What do you think the hardest part of returning home will be?
- What, or who, are you SO excited to return home to?
- What will you miss the most?
- What are you afraid of?
- What is something you learned that you will share with others?
- What new practices from this program will you continue when home?
- How can you share your experience in 2 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes?
- How can you keep connected to your new friends? Do you have a plan in place?

Reverse Culture Shock

When a person returns to their home community, they often go through a cultural adjustment process. This experience, called “reverse culture shock” is a period of readjustment to home life. During reverse culture shock, deep learning about yourself, your community, and your experience can happen. Much like there are ups and downs to cultural adjustment, there are ups and downs in your experience coming home. You may be so excited to see your friends and eat your favorite foods, and you might be “homesick” for your Experiment group or feel that people around you just don’t understand how you have changed over the summer.

There are typically four stages to reverse culture shock:

1. Arrival
2. Reverse Culture Shock
3. Recovery
4. Adaptation

Essentially, you arrive home, and you are relieved and excited to be back in a place you know. Then you start to notice new things about your home, your community, your country. You start to consider new aspects of your life at home that you had not previously noticed, for example, how many choices a particular item are available in the grocery store, or the different “norms” around public spaces. Then in the adjustment stage you start re-incorporating what you learned and saw abroad into your day-to-day life. Maybe you keep the routine of espresso with breakfast, or you eat breakfast everyday where before you would just run out the door to school. Maybe you find a way to keep practicing your Spanish skills, or you share about your time in Mongolia with friends at school. What felt “abnormal” about life back at home starts to recalibrate and you get used to your “new normal” with your new perspectives on yourself and the world, this is the adaptation phase.

Feeling “out of sorts” is a very normal experience upon returning home from an immersive international experience. You may find you need extra sleep for a few days, and your mood may be a little unpredictable. We suggest that you are gentle with yourself and allow time for this adjustment to happen. Past Experimenters have shared that keeping in touch with their group, sharing their stories from their time abroad, and re-reading their travel journal, and attending an online or in-person “Welcome Back” event with The Experiment are all activities that helped with their cultural re-adjustment.

There are many [study abroad resources](#) available online to help support your re-adjustment to life back at home:



STAYING IN TOUCH WITH THE EXPERIMENT AND WORLD LEARNING

When you return, you may notice a difference in your thinking and perspective. We encourage you to share your story with family members and friends. We have learned that when Experimenters reflect on and communicate what they’ve learned, their experience returning home becomes easier. We also invite you to share photos with us. If you would like advice on sharing your story after the program, please let us know.

After the program, you will also be invited to participate in The Experiment’s re-entry workshops this fall, both in person (select areas) and online. At these workshops, you and your family will have the chance to share your experiences with other Experimenters, leaders, and staff members, and brainstorm ways to bring them back to your everyday life at home.

We want to give you the opportunity to continue to develop your connections at home. Their participation in The Experiment opens a network of over 100,000 World Learning alumni from over 140 countries!

The World Learning alumni network is an 85+ year old resource for continual learning and global networking. For example, did you know that the World Learning family includes:

- [World Learning](#): Impacting people in more than 150 countries, World Learning is a global nonprofit working to create a more peaceful and just world through education, sustainable development, and exchange.
- [SIT Study Abroad](#): Providing more than 80 immersive summer and semester-long study abroad programs for undergraduates on seven continents. providing more than 80 immersive summer and semester-long study abroad programs for undergraduates on seven continents.
- [SIT Graduate Institute](#): Experiential and global master’s degree programs focused on some of the world’s most pressing issues.

One thing these programs all have in common is the development of future leaders. As a member of the World Learning family, you are now eligible for The Advancing Leaders Fellowship. This program trains emerging leaders to make real change in their communities through social innovation. Fellows are selected through a competitive application process and have an opportunity to receive funding for their community projects. As an Experimenter, you are now an alum of the World Learning family. We hope that you will consider one of our other international programs in the future.

GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

These guidelines and policies have been developed based on 90 years of experience with international youth exchange programs. We always keep in mind Experimenters' welfare, families' expectations of the program, and our educational goals. We expect Experimenters to adhere to these guidelines. Your group leaders may modify these guidelines to adapt to elements of the host culture or for special circumstances.

During orientation, when you and your group, and possibly other Experiment groups, are at a hotel or hostel:

- The group leaders and any in-country staff establish policies and guidelines in keeping with the host culture.

During the homestay, language study, and/or thematic component:

- Policies and guidelines are set by the host family, in-country staff, and group leaders, and will be in keeping with the laws of the host country.

During city stays, trips/excursions, and other times in public accommodations:

- During the day, Experimenters must be in a group of three or more.
- During evening hours, students must be with a group leader. (The group leader may set a curfew if they feel a particular situation warrants doing so.)
- *Travel in groups of three policy:* For safety, Experimenters should not travel by themselves. There may be opportunities where your Experiment group may split into smaller groups to explore a neighborhood or utilize unscheduled program time, during these times Experimenters must always be in a group of at least three participants.

Policies

Below is a list of The Experiment's institutional policies and procedures that are available on the [policies website page](#).

- Alcohol & Drug Policy
- Online & Social Media Policy
- Water Policy
- Homestay Expectations
- COVID-19 Risk Management Protocols
- Discrimination, Harassment, and Safeguarding Policies

GENERAL RULES

Experimenters are responsible for their own behavior.

The Experiment's Essential Participation Expectations (listed on the Pre-Departure Information webpage) and the Conditions of Participation have been established for Experimenters and are appropriate for your summer experience. However, your conduct must also be consistent with, and respectful of, what is expected by host families and others in the program's host country.

The Experiment group itself is diverse, so each member's conduct must be sensitive to, and respectful of, all others in the group. Experimenters' conduct must reflect favorably on World Learning as an international educational organization, which has emphasized cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity, and respect around the world for 90 years.

The following activities are prohibited for reasons relating to safety, health, and legal liability:

- Hitchhiking
- Driving any motorized vehicle
- Parachuting
- Bungee jumping
- Hang-gliding
- Riding in private airplanes
- Rock climbing
- Base jumping
- Bridge/cliff jumping
- Branding

- Tattooing
- Surfing
- Scuba diving
- Possession or use of firearms

World Learning prohibits Experimenters from participating in, attending, or otherwise engaging in political protests, rallies, demonstrations, or acts of civil disobedience at any time while on the program. Experimenters may not use any alcohol or drugs of any kind, including smoking (tobacco, vaping, hookah, etc.). Experimenters may not operate or ride on any two-wheeled motor driven vehicle (e.g., motorcycle, moped, motorized or electric scooter, motorcycle taxi, etc.) or other kinds of recreational motorized transports, except where the transportation is operated by a third-party service provider engaged by The Experiment for group activities. In addition, Experimenters are not permitted to engage in any and all challenges, games, dares, etc. which could be dangerous to health and safety, including but not limited to food or beverage consumption challenges like the cinnamon and similar challenges, asphyxiation games like the choking game or pass-out challenge, and escalating truth or dare scenarios like the blue whale challenge. Engaging in these behaviors may lead to dismissal from the program.

Please also see the Conditions of Participation that follows and refer to the Essential Participation Expectations (listed on the [Pre-Departure Information](#) webpage) for more on the subject of inappropriate behavior that could lead to dismissal.

LEARNING COMMUNITY

Learning in community is an important pedagogical approach to Experiment programs. Therefore participant behavioral expectations center on creating an inclusive learning community that is conducive to learning and growth.

Participant behavioral expectations, as listed in the Conditions of Participation, exist to protect the learning community and challenge those whose behavior is not in accordance with World Learning and The Experiment's values, standards, and policies. The Experiment's approach to addressing violations of the Conditions of Participation are intended to challenge students' moral and ethical decision-making and to help them bring their behavior into accord with our community expectations.

THE EXPERIMENT'S CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION AND PROCEDURES

While enrolled in any Experiment program, you are, at all times, representatives of the United States or your home country, and The Experiment, and you must abide by the following Conditions of Participation and all other policies for the duration of the program. As a result, anyone enrolled in the program who engages in conduct unbecoming an Experimenter will be violating this code and will be subject to appropriate review and disciplinary sanctions, up to and including dismissal from the program.

Experimenters and their families must acknowledge and accept that The Experiment has the authority, at all times, to establish rules of conduct necessary for the operation of the program, which includes Experimenters' free time. You must also agree to accept disciplinary action deemed appropriate by The Experiment, which may include dismissal from the program.

The Experiment adheres to a practice of progressive discipline including, but not limited to: verbal warnings, revoking privileges, phone/email correspondence with families and mentoring/partner organizations or schools, written behavior contracts, and dismissal from program. The Experiment has zero tolerance for illegal and/or unprescribed drugs. In the event of use of illegal and/or unprescribed drugs, an Experimenter will be dismissed from the program.

Progressive discipline is at the discretion of The Experiment and depending on the seriousness of the offending behavior, may proceed with dismissal without any preceding discipline.

PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Definition: World Learning/The Experiment prefers to manage behavioral issues in a manner that progressively increases in formality, as well as consequences.

Verbal check-in and clarification of possible consequences: Leaders may first have a conversation with the participant. A warning may be issued, specific to the behavior(s) observed, the norm violated, and the goals for modified behaviors moving forward.

Written Behavior Contract: If a participant continues behavior after the leaders have tried verbal interventions, leaders may work with the participant to create a behavior contract. The written behavior contract serves mostly as a tool to help the participant get on track toward following all norms and expectations. The written behavior contract will also be shared with World Learning/Experiment home office and the participant's parent/guardian, and mentor organization (if applicable).

Experiment parents/guardians will be informed, and it may be after the contract is put in place.

In some cases, a policy violation is severe enough to warrant immediate dismissal from a program.

Dismissal: A participant who continues behavior after receiving a behavior contract will elevate the incident and may be subject to dismissal. No dismissal will occur without intervention from World Learning/The Experiment and local international partners, and likely conversation with parents/guardians.

Exception to Progressive Discipline Policy: Any participant or leader who is a threat to themselves or others, or who violates the controlled substances policy or sexual misconduct policy may be immediately dismissed. The Alcohol and Drug policy are found on the [Policies page](#).

Violation of the Discrimination, Harassment, and Safeguarding policies may result in disciplinary action and investigation, as noted on the [Policies page](#). Participants going under investigation may also result in temporary separation from The Experiment group.



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For 90 years, World Learning has equipped individuals and institutions to address the world's most pressing problems. We believe that, working together with our partners, we can change this world for the better.

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World Learning

1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676
Brattleboro, Vermont
05302-0676
USA

1015 15th St NW, #750
Washington, DC
20005
USA

worldlearning.org
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The World Learning family of programs also includes:

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