

# Culture Adjustment & Safety Abroad: What to Know Before You Go!



We hope that you are as excited as we are about the upcoming semester! The ESC has created this guide to help you prepare for a successful study abroad experience. Learn about culture adjustment before you arrive, and read what you need to know to stay safe while abroad and traveling. We also suggest setting goals prior to arriving. The ESC staff is interested in learning about the things you are looking forward to as well those that are sources of concern in helping you reach those goals. Please take the time to send us your answer to these six questions and review the remainder of the materials before you start packing.

1. What are you looking forward to in your upcoming semester abroad?
2. What challenges do you think await you?
3. What are your main concerns?
4. How do you think the culture will be similar to your own?
5. What differences do you expect to encounter in Germany/France?
6. Have you been to any foreign countries already? If so, which one(s)?

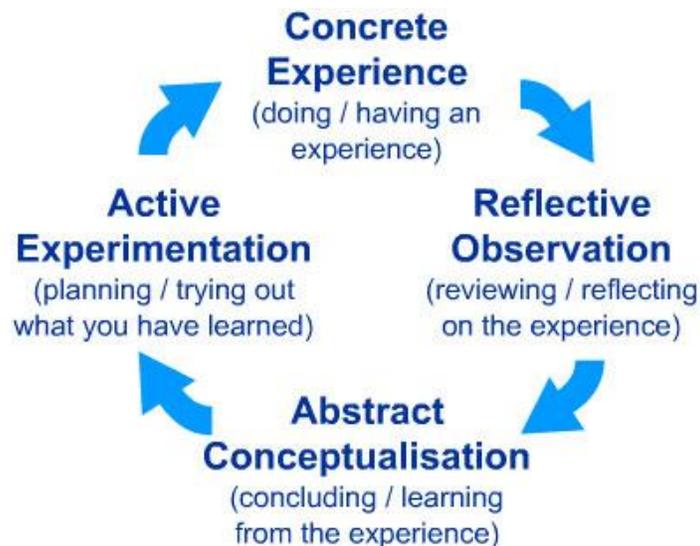
## Questions about Germany/France – How much do you know?

1. What are common greetings?
2. What are the key historic events?
3. Which political system is in place?
4. Is there a predominant religion?
5. How does this influence the people and traditions?
6. What differences are there between the education system and your home country?
7. How are relations between Germany/France and your home country?
8. How are people from your home country perceived?
9. Where do the perceptions come from?
10. What are your perceptions of Germans/French?
11. Where do your perceptions come from?
12. How do Germans/French spend their free time?
13. How important is dress and appearance?
14. What are the current issues and topics of interest facing Germany, France, and the EU?
15. What are the minority groups?

16. How are they treated?
17. How do people view the differences between men and women?
18. How do these differences appear in daily life?
19. What are the main differences in communication you notice between Germans/French and your home country (speaking distance, gestures, and expressiveness)?
20. What rules of etiquette should you follow in daily interaction?

## Will you experience cultural adjustment?

Most people experience a period of cultural adjustment to some degree. There are five general phases and people may not always experience them in the same way, but it helps to know that up and down feelings are normal as you adjust to your new environment and culture.



1. In the arrival phase all is new and you feel ready and confident to experience it all.
2. Although culture adjustment will likely occur throughout your time abroad when the novelty wears off and you get tired of not being able to understand the language, you may experience an initial “low.”
3. As you acquire new coping skills you begin to adjust and feel comfortable.
4. As times you may feel lonely or miss the familiar comforts of home – this is normal. Talk with the ESC staff and other students.
5. You feel at home here and have adopted some of the local habits.

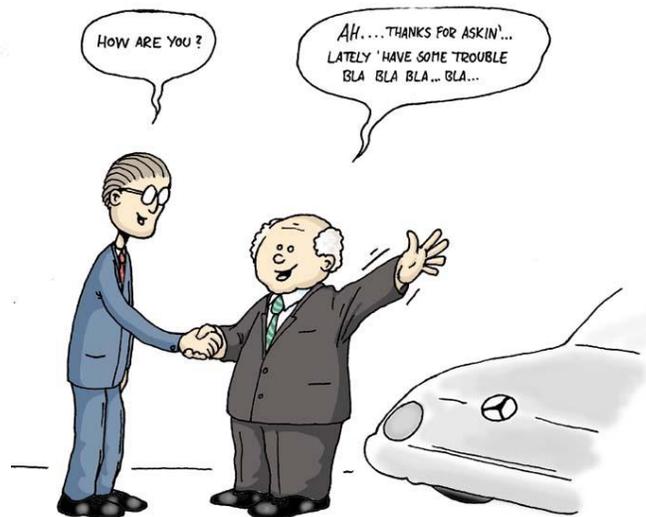
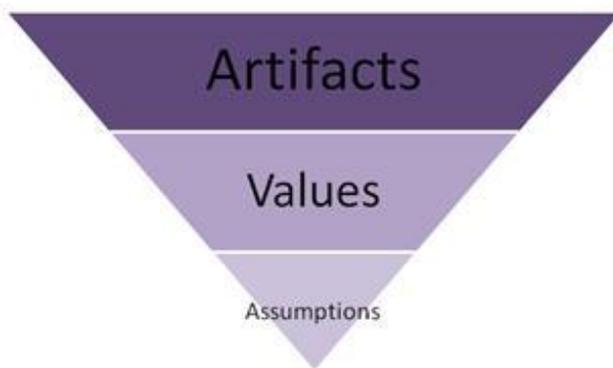
### What are the challenges of Cultural Adjustment?

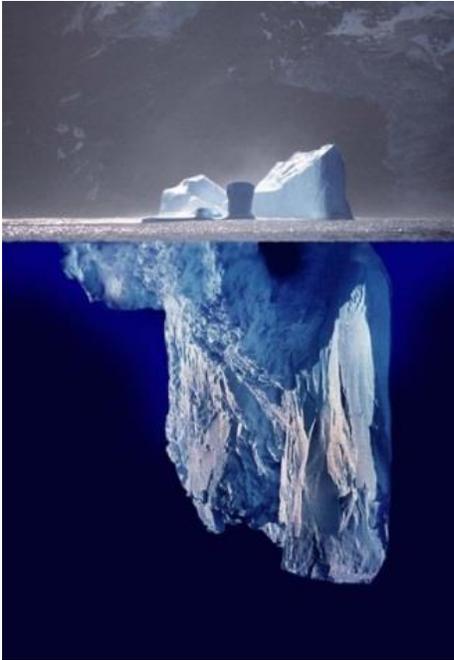
- A new school setting
- Different or new friends
- A new housing arrangement
- Not having your family and friends nearby
- A foreign culture
- A foreign language
- New activities
- Changes to daily routine

### Go With a Plan!

- Learn as much as you can about the country you're going to.
- Be realistic and remember that no matter how experienced you are, we all meet obstacles and bumps in the road.
- Take time to observe - some aspects of culture are hidden at first and can be difficult to understand. Try to go deeper and discover which values, beliefs and traditions cultures use to guide their behavior.

**Keep in mind that there are valid reasons why cultures are different, and these reasons are not always obvious. Try to discover the values and belief which lie beneath the surface.**





## The Iceberg Metaphor of Culture

The concept that, just as nine-tenths of an iceberg is out of sight below the surface of the water, so is a large proportion of culture out of view of conscious awareness. At the tip are the easy differences for people to notice, such as different style, language, or food. In-depth awareness is developed over time as one gains a deeper understanding of the host culture and gains knowledge of differences that are below the surface and more difficult for an outsider to identify and understand.

<http://apps.forumea.org/CultureandLearning.cfm>

**What do you expect from your semester aboard? Prepare by setting personal, academic, and career goals for the upcoming semester.**



### Start Planning Now

These goals are intended to be samples to encourage your thinking. Please develop goals that engage and inspire you. You will want goals that help you develop your knowledge, skills, and sensitivities related to your major(s), minor(s), career goals, volunteerism, hobbies, heritage, and general interests. Know that some of your goals may have to be augmented, adjusted, or abandoned once you get abroad and that you may find that you want to add new goals. Plan ahead but be ready to revise as you learn more about the host culture, classes, and host country.

### Personal Goals

- I will learn to use the public transportation system in Heidelberg/Strasbourg.
- I will learn to notice and understand similarities and differences in gestures, facial expressions, and physical space between my home and Germany/France.
- I will go to one new social, artistic, music, or cultural event each week.
- I will develop two German/French friendships by the end of my stay by proactively participating in activities, sports, events, and clubs with other students.
- I will stay in contact with my home country family and friends but not at the expense of neglecting to develop new friendships and getting to know Heidelberg/Strasbourg.
- I will have fun and keep myself safe and healthy.

## Academic and Career Goals

- I will participate in an internship, research opportunity, part-time job (if allowed), or volunteer opportunity related to my major, minor, and/or career goals.
- I will learn as much as I can about how my intended career is trained for, practiced, and supported in Germany/France.
- I will learn to describe my experiences abroad (courses, co-curricular, internships, research, etc.) in terms that a future employer, grad or professional school interviewer will understand and appreciate.
- I will improve my language and cross-cultural skills to benefit my future employment.



## The Process

Once you have identified and written out your goals, you will need to figure out how to achieve those goals. What organizations you will need to join, what opportunities you will need to take advantage of, how will you need to observe and discuss with host nationals to learn.

## Stay Safe Abroad

**Staying safe and healthy while abroad is important. While you are in a new environment using the same common sense and precautions you do at home and getting familiar with the general safety tips below will help you minimize your risk.**

### Legal Status, Passport, and Visa

- The U.S. State Department issues Travel Warnings. Stay alert with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](http://travel.state.gov/), a free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.  
<http://travel.state.gov/>
- Before you go, get online and find the telephone number for the US Embassy and consulates in the country you are visiting. Make sure you understand how to place the call from within the country, and that you have enough credit available. Also, always pack your battery charger.
- Be aware of your legal status, visas, and entry requirements for every country you visit.
- The best thing to do is to keep your passport somewhere on you, such as in a zipped pocket, where you won't lose it and pickpockets can't get it. Also keep a copy of your passport and store it in a safe place. Carry two extra passport-sized photos in a separate place from where you normally keep your passport.
- If you should lose your passport or have it stolen, contact the closest Embassy or consulate. At most U.S. Embassies or Consulates you can get a passport replaced while you wait if you have a photocopy, photos, and of cash (around \$150).

## **Personal Safety**

- Staying alert and not panicking is the key to safety in any city.
- Keep your phone on and charged and save the ESC emergency number!
- Keep your eyes open. Watch yourself, your valuables, and your friends!
- If you do drink, do not drink to excess; people under the influence are targets for criminals, as drinking hinders your ability to know when a situation is dangerous. Drunkenness is a big social faux-pas in most European countries.
- Never accept a drink from someone you don't know and don't leave your own drinks unattended.
- It is illegal to use, buy or sell drugs in any amount. It's also dangerous.
- Never go home with someone you have just met. Keep a map of the city with you always, and stay alert and know where you are.
- Don't go around alone at night. But be aware that a large group also draws a lot of attention. It's best to go around in small groups of two to four people.
- Don't travel home alone at night. If you take a cab but make sure it is a properly licensed cab (never an unmarked car) and don't take one that already has passengers inside.
- Be cautious when meeting new people. Do not give new acquaintances your home or dorm address or the ESC office address.

## **Safety in Public Places**

- Try to blend in with your surroundings, maintain a low profile, don't attract attention, and speak in a lower voice. Americans are often identified by being loud in public.
- Avoid discussing politics in public. Be aware of what you discuss with strangers or what others may overhear.
- Avoid areas where demonstrations are in progress.
- Never accept a package or suitcase from someone you don't know well. Likewise, don't offer to watch someone else's belongings in train/bus stations, airports, or public places.