Considerations for Travel During a Pandemic

WKU Global Learning & International Affairs appreciates your commitment to pursuing a global learning experience. However, it is important to note that nothing about travel during a pandemic is predictable and it can pose unanticipated challenges and costs. Global learning experiences during a pandemic will be different from what you might have imagined and so it is important for you to manage your expectations of the experience. Patience and flexibility are key. The information below includes examples of potential impacts to your planned global learning experience, but it is not exhaustive.

Academics

- Courses may need to change in the following ways throughout your program:
    - Shift of the mode of instruction (online, hybrid, in person, etc.)
    - Availability of certain classes may be reduced
    - Syllabus, and/or assessment may be adjusted
    - Classes may be cancelled
- If your program is cancelled by the provider/host institution or students are required to return home by WKU mid-program, students need to understand how they will complete courses for the semester
- Students should have a back-up plan in case the courses they plan to take are cancelled and/or travel is not possible, such as registering for courses on-campus for the semester they are intending to be away
- Students should be prepared that their program itinerary and expected program activities/experiences may change unexpectedly and that their program may look different than what was originally planned

Financial

- You must carefully review the cancellation policies of the specific program provider and/or host institution abroad, including refund policies. WKU is not responsible for any cancellation fees and/or penalties that students may incur. How will you be financially impacted by any of the possible scenarios below?:
    - WKU does not approve your study abroad plans and you must withdraw from your program
    - You decide to withdraw from the program for your own reasons prior to program start date
    - Your program provider and/or host institution cancels your program prior to the start date
    - WKU requires that you return home mid-program
    - Your program provider and/or host institution cancels your experience mid-program
- You are responsible for having access to emergency funds should you be required to return home early from your program or stay longer than expected due to COVID-19 illness and/or quarantine
- You should be prepared for costs before, during, and after your program for COVID-19 testing, quarantines, housing, or travel expenses that are in addition to what is included in your program cost
- It is highly recommended that you purchase [Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) Insurance](#)

Health & Wellness

- WKU Global Learning & International Affairs (GLIA) will work closely with partners, but cannot guarantee a COVID-19-free environment
- Students must be enrolled in comprehensive international travel & medical insurance for the duration of their program. You will either be enrolled through your program provider or by WKU if your program does not provide this service or service provided does not meet minimum WKU requirements (WKU CISI insurance premium is billed to your WKU account). Contact GLIA if you have questions about whether your program includes comprehensive insurance or if you will be under WKU's CISI insurance plan
    - CISI will not pay for evacuation expenses or benefits due to a pandemic; it will pay for medical expenses or medical evacuation if you become ill and clinically warranted
- Students need to understand their medical insurance and claims process prior to departure
    - Read plan before departure
    - Complete any insurance account registrations
    - Have access to any insurance cards provided with plan
    - Know that you may have to pay up-front for services used on-site and then be reimbursed
- You must read the current [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) and [U.S. Department of State](#) (USDOS) guidelines for your host country and any country where you may travel, including countries you may transit through
- You are responsible for researching and adhering to the COVID-19 vaccine requirements of WKU, your program provider, host institution, and/or host country. These requirements may change at any time
    - Will you need to receive a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot while you are away? Are COVID-19 vaccines available to foreigners on-site?
- You are responsible for researching the COVID-19 mitigation plan of your program provider and/or host institution
- Students must follow any public health and safety measures that may be implemented by their host country or program
- Prior to their departure, students should talk with their personal healthcare provider about any underlying health conditions that may put them at higher risk for complications from COVID-19 and whether studying abroad/away is advisable at this time
- Students will wear a mask, practice safe physical distancing, and follow any other local/country requirements that are in place or encouraged by guidance
- You may be required to enroll in and/or abide by COVID-19 tracking, tracing or monitoring protocols adopted by your host country or program, including mobile apps
    - If an app is used, can you use your current phone or will you need a local phone?
- Access to COVID-19 treatments, vaccines, or medical care may be less accessible or less available in some countries or locations
- WKU requires students to follow Healthy on the Hill Guidelines and CDC guidelines for returning to the U.S. and campus
- If you become overwhelmed while on-site (with school, COVID-19, being away from home, etc.):
    - Tell your on-site staff and your WKU study abroad advisor – EVEN if you think it's something small
    - Utilize stress management techniques that work for you
- If you think you might be sick when on-site:
    - Don't go out, especially without a mask, unless it's to seek medical attention

- o Let somebody know (from your program or host institution) if you are sick
- o Seek medical attention from a doctor
    - Someone from your program may be able to assist you in making a doctor's appointment
    - Or you might need to contact a clinic directly
- o Monitor your symptoms (temperature, cough, body aches, etc.)
- o If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, follow guidelines from your medical professional and local authorities
- o If you become extremely ill or injured, your insurance will cover expenses but remember that your families will not be able to be with you. They may not be able to travel to your host country

Travel

- WKU Student Travel Policy restricts students from travelling to locations with a U.S. Department of State (USDOS) Travel Advisory Level of 3, "Reconsider Travel," and prohibits students from travelling to Travel Advisory Level 4, "Do Not Travel," locations.
    - o As of 2/24/2022 an addendum has been approved for the WKU Student International Travel Policy to allow students to *appeal to travel* to locations with a USDOS Level 4 Travel Advisory if the Level 4 Advisory is for COVID-19 (i.e. "Do not travel to [Insert location] due to COVID-19," or "Do not travel to [insert location] due to COVID-19-related restrictions). Appeal to locations with a Level 4 Travel Advisory for any other reason will not be considered.
        - There are no guarantees that appeals to travel to a Level 3 location or Level 4 COVID-19 location will be approved
    - o USDOS Travel Advisories are fluctuating more frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic.
        - Students should be prepared that Level 1 or 2 locations may increase and an appeal will be required
- Any WKU study abroad application acceptances and/or approvals to travel are provisional and WKU, in its sole discretion, may withdraw approval for or insist on modifications of international travel at any time
- Students are required and responsible for enrolling in the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)
- You must follow domestic and international laws and regulations regarding travel and quarantine. Any costs related to quarantine will be at your own expense unless it is stated specifically as included by your program provider and/or host institution
- Students are responsible, in collaboration with program provider and/or on-site host institution staff, for researching the requirements for entering their host country
    - o A good resource is the U.S. Embassy website for your country
    - o Many countries now require visas, even for short-term programs, where they might not have previously been needed. Students should contact the consulate/embassy of their host country and work with their program provider to determine visa requirements and for information on the visa application process
    - o You may need to provide, at your own expense, proof of a negative COVID-19 test in a short time frame prior to departure from the U.S. and/or to enter your host country
        - If a negative COVID-19 is required, what type of test is acceptable?

- - - Will you be tested at the airport when you arrive?
  - o You may need to provide proof of receiving, or having a medical or religious exemption from a COVID-19 vaccination and booster vaccination prior to departure
    - - If vaccines are required, what vaccines are acceptable?
    - - When should you have received your last dose before departure?
- You should familiarize yourself with the public transportation options in your host country and the COVID-19 practices and policies for using public transportation
  - o What is required to access public transportation? (i.e. negative COVID test or proof of COVID-19 vaccination?)
  - o What are your public transportation options?
  - o Avoid using crowded buses, trains, trams, etc
- Students should understand that independent travel, including during weekends and academic breaks, and available modes of transportation, may be limited or prohibited and creates additional layers of risk
  - o Students who are allowed and choose to travel independently may be required to quarantine upon return to their host site. Absences are typically not excused for these quarantines and this may negatively impact your academic performance
- You may need to be tested for COVID-19 and quarantine upon return to the United States due to U.S. governmental, CDC and/or WKU regulations. You should consider the impact on your potential plans and obligations once you return (i.e. the start of the next semester at WKU or employment obligations)
- Students and their family/friends should understand that they will need to follow program or country requirements if they would like to have family or friends visit during their program
- If required (by your host country or program), you need to arrive with enough time to quarantine as prescribed, prior to the start of the program
- Things to consider if you do have a mandatory quarantine period upon arrival to your program:
  - o Make a plan – understand your resources
  - o What is available to you during the quarantine period? (i.e. meals, cleaning supplies, entertainment/activities)
  - o Understand your responsibilities during quarantine (i.e.: are you required to attend online classes during this time)
  - o Think about how you will entertain yourself:
    - - Streaming apps, gaming, books, social media, explore your host city/country virtually, crafts
- Flying During COVID
  - o We highly recommend buying flight cancellation insurance
    - - Each airline typically offers their own with specific rules and restrictions
  - o Students should either travel on their program's group flight or purchase flight tickets directly from the airline (i.e. purchasing through companies like Expedia and Priceline is not recommended)
  - o You will need to carefully review ticket change fees and policies, travel insurance options, and the airline's protocols for COVID-19 – this may include providing negative COVID-19 tests, the requirement for vaccination and the completion of a "vaccination passport" prior to travel
    - - If testing is required, what type of test is valid?
    - - If vaccines are required, what vaccines are acceptable?

- When buying your plane ticket, give yourself more time between flights (i.e. layovers of at least an hour and a half or more)
- Finding your gate and boarding may take longer than expected due to social distancing and airport COVID-19 protocols
- Arrive at the airport earlier than usual
  - Give yourself a minimum of 3 hours to get through security and find your terminal and gate
- If you have a LONG layover, like more than a couple of hours...
  - Use the time to rest, call friends and family, and stay safe.
  - Stay in the airport – the location you're in might have COVID-19 restrictions you don't know about or meet, and leaving the airport could cause trouble getting back in

- COVID Packing List
  - Negative COVID-19 test results and/or proof of COVID-19 vaccination (if required)
    - Keep a printed version in case your phone dies before you get to your destination
  - Face masks that cover your nose and mouth
    - Reusable ones are recommended
    - Bring extra!
  - Hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and disinfecting wipes
  - Disposable gloves
  - Medication
    - Be sure you have enough to last through the duration of quarantine and program dates
  - Extra snacks
    - Especially important if your country requires quarantine when you arrive!
  - Copy of vaccination card, copy of negative test
  - Copy of your Safety & Security Review (from WKU study abroad application)

Housing

- It is important to think about the various COVID-19 risk factors that may exist with any on-site housing arrangements (i.e. # of roommates, public gathering places and/or common use areas such as kitchens and bathrooms) and how your program and/or housing facility is mitigating those risks
- Housing options may change at any time whether it is prior to departure or during the program and this may impact your experience on-site, such as not being able to stay with a host family, have local students as roommates, or have a roommate at all
- Research your housing facility's visitors' policy
- If you have roommates, you should agree upon a COVID-19 living plan. Make a cleaning plan and have cleaning supplies on-hand.
  - Have a conversation with your roommate(s) about comfort level with COVID-19
    - If you aren't comfortable with your roommate's choices, voice your concerns
    - If your roommate isn't comfortable with your choices, respect their concerns

- Do you know who to ask for help to resolve conflicts with your roommate if you can't?