

III. Managing Finances

Initial Funds

You should plan to have a couple hundred dollars with you for travel and initial expenses. It's a good idea to obtain some local currency in advance if possible. It is also a good idea to have some money available as emergency funds (traveler's checks are secure in that they can be replaced if lost or stolen). **However check with your program about whether traveler's checks are recommended for your countries of travel.** Normally you can access funds from ATM machines in airports upon arrival, but you should check ahead of time if that is going to be the case, and always have more than one way to access funds, should one method not work. If you are a member of the Swarthmore Credit Union you can order some foreign currency in advance of travel.

Direct Deposit

Arrange for direct deposit with the business office at Swarthmore so that any monies that OCS needs to give you (e.g., money for your flight, or room and board if you are required to manage your own living costs). You can arrange for direct deposit from the menu options in mySwarthmore.

Bank Accounts

It may make sense for you to open a bank account while abroad, particularly if you will be abroad for an academic year (you should receive advice about this from your host program or university). You should check to see if your US bank has a branch or a relationship with a bank where you are going to be. This would allow you to make banking arrangements before you leave. More commonly you would be in the position of opening a bank account upon arrival. You can then deposit funds into the new account (e.g. travelers checks) or you can arrange to have money wired from a bank account at home to the new account. You should not plan to deposit a check drawn on an American bank to establish the new account. That could take several months to clear or simply might not be acceptable. You will not be able to pay for things abroad with domestic US checks.

Credit Cards and ATMs

Master Card and Visa are the most commonly used cards abroad. American Express offers a variety of services at American Express offices, including personal check cashing. Be sure to know what your limits are on your cards, and inform your bank that you will be using the cards abroad for an extended period of time (**otherwise you run the risk of the cards being stopped by your bank**). You should also make sure that the primary account on your ATM is a checking account (not savings). Unfortunately many ATM machines in the US and abroad are rigged so that your account information can be stolen when you swipe your card. Try to use ATM machines in locations that make them less likely to have been tampered with. Find out what scams are operating in your new town or city abroad. Make sure that someone back home is paying your credit card bills!

Make sure you know what charges you will incur for using your credit card or ATM card abroad. The fees can be steep. Try to negotiate a reduction in the fees before you leave for your travels.

Don't forget, too, that credit cards offer good exchange rates as well, but they do charge foreign transaction fees. A foreign transaction fee is likely to be a percentage of each transaction rather than a straight fee. A small number of major card issuers don't charge any fees at all: e.g., Capital One and Discover. Discover is only accepted in certain locations, namely Canada, Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and China, but Capital One is accepted everywhere Visa or Mastercard are accepted (depending on which card you have).

Safety

Get advice from your program or university about the best place to secure your personal belongings, including credit and ATM cards, your passport, and your cash. Once residing abroad, do not carry items with you on a daily basis that you do not need, and that you can leave in a secure place. Have copies of your passport and credit card information (including the numbers to call in the event your cards are lost or stolen) in a location that is separate from the original items. You should also leave this information at home with someone who can help you if you lose your travel documents and your credit cards.

NEVER put your personal information (social security number, credit card information, etc.) in an electronic document that can be accessed should your computer be hacked into. This also means do not scan or email personal information and send it to yourself by email. Keep separate paper copies of important documents and contact numbers should you need to discontinue a stolen credit card.

It's a good idea to leave copies of all of this information at home with a family member or other trusted individual as well.

Save Funds/US Currency for Return Trip

Save some USD for the return to the US as well as for any unforeseen expenses/travel/emergencies along the way. This is an important concept for any traveler and needs to be part of your personal crisis planning because there are many reasons why your travel could be disrupted and you need to be prepared (e.g., unforeseen health, safety, or security situations that result in either your need to shelter in place for a time or your need to leave your environs quickly). Also, sometimes USD can be used abroad instead of local currency.

Suggestions from the Franklin Mint Federal Credit Union (FMFCU)

Some foreign currencies can be ordered through the FMFCU and is normally available in about two business days when ordered in the branch office or through ebanking. Be sure to change your mailing contact details prior to going abroad. Use ebanking to see your account activity. Select "credit" when using your debit card abroad.