

Some Tips to Follow When Visiting the TMC Sister Schools

This manual is meant to be a guide when preparing to go to one of our sister schools. Not all of it may apply to you, or it might fit you perfectly, but please make some use out of it, because I promise it will help you in some way. If you notice anything that should be changed or updated, don't hesitate to let someone know! I've tried to make this experience a little less daunting and a little less stressful, so hopefully it will help you in some way. Good luck with your travels and HAVE FUN!! It will be one of the best experiences of your life if you take advantage of it.

To my fellow student:

As a precursor to this manual, I felt that it would be appropriate to write a short letter of introduction and of advice. I was prompted to begin this project because of experiences I had when I visited Thomas More's sister school in Puerto Rico, Universidad del Sagrado Corazon. Personally, I was not expecting the challenges that lay before me, and although I was anticipating an experience that would promote my growth as an individual, I wasn't expecting to learn so much about myself. I don't mean to bore you with this letter, only to warn you and to help you realize what you should expect when you travel to one of the sister schools.

In order to complete the experience, you are forced to step out of your comfort zone. You are not given a choice in the matter, because suddenly, you are immersed in another culture, complete with another language. You might be the farthest away from home you've ever been alone, or you may not, but it feels like you are, and it seems like your loved ones are inaccessible, mostly because they do not understand your experiences, and how much you need their support. I've never missed the people I see on a daily and weekly basis as much as I did when I was away for the month I was absent from home. Personally, I can say that you need to make sure you have a solid support system at home. Make sure there are people you can talk to about what you are doing and that they will understand some of the trouble you are having. Be sure that you have a person you can talk to that will make you laugh, have a person who misses you so much it makes them sick, and have a person that you can lean on in case you encounter some rough times. Homesickness was the biggest obstacle I had to overcome while I was gone, and I think it would have helped if I would have had a more solid and steady base of support back home. I don't mean to scare anyone here, only to prepare you, so don't let me scare you, because I would suggest and encourage anyone and everyone to take advantage of this experience.

Personally, this was an experience that I will always carry with me. It was an experience that helped me to learn more about myself, about my strengths and weaknesses, and about who I really am as a person. I wouldn't have traded the experience for anything, although I wish that it would have gone a bit more smoothly. I think it is an experience that everyone should take advantage of, because you can't learn here what you learn while you are away. I appreciate everything I have now, and I realize how very valuable the people in my life are. I also realize the full value of all of my material belongings and how lucky I am for the opportunities I've had, but also the material items I have. This may sound nerdy, or you may be thinking 'yeah right, whatever,' but I promise you realize what you have when you're away from it.

If you have a significant other, the biggest advice I can give you is not to worry about that while you are gone, because it makes it so much harder to be away. Just realize that if it is meant to work out with that person that he/she will still be there when you get home, and that person will be anticipating your return as much as you are. Don't worry about what's going on at home, take full advantage of where you are. Try not to think about what your significant other or friends or family are doing back home, look at what you are doing and realize that you are experiencing something they never will. You might wish to be home for some things, or to do certain things that your friends are doing, but realize that although you're not there, you are having just as much fun and you're having one of the best experiences of your life. Take full advantage of experiencing the culture. Even if you have a significant other, DO NOT let that

deter you from enjoying the night life or keep you from meeting and talking to people. I didn't miss out on going anywhere, but I did miss out on meeting more people than I did, because I didn't want it to have an effect on my relationship at home. I wish I could take that back. I wish I could go back and talk to all those people (guys) that I kind of blew off, because of someone back home. Talking and immersing yourself in the culture are harmless, and keep in mind I'm not encouraging you to do anything crazy, like going home with someone, or starting a love affair while you are gone, but don't miss an opportunity to meet people and to learn from them. Also, try not to become too emotionally attached to anyone while you are gone. Realize that you will not be there that long, and that the chances of making it work are slim to none. I'm not trying to be pessimistic, just realistic. One of the girls I met while I was in Puerto Rico began seeing someone while she was there, and they had every intention of continuing to date when she left. The problem was that it made it harder for her to leave when our time was over. He made it more of a challenge and harder to deal with the reality that her experience abroad was over. They talked a couple of times after she got back home, but it didn't work, and both have moved on. The tears she cried there were not worth it. Get to know people, but try not to become too emotionally attached.

I could babble on forever about my experiences, but it would take the fun out of yours, so that is where I stop my words of advice and caution. You can take it or leave it, but I hope that at least a little bit of it is of some value to you. One more piece of advice though before I close. If you do get homesick, do not sit in your room alone. Go out and do something. Find someone who is going out, even if you don't want to. Trust me, it helps. Have as much fun as you can, and learn as much as you can. Remember that you might not ever get the chance to do anything ~~like this ever again, so don't miss out on anything, and challenge yourself to discover it all.~~ Good luck, and please don't let me scare you. I'm just trying to eliminate some shock value, and remember that not everyone is alike, so your experience might be completely different from mine, in which case you can trash this letter. I would have found this information helpful though, so that is why I am writing it down for others now. HAVE FUN!!!

Sincerely,

Lindsay Wilson

A. Who Do I Talk To??

Get in touch with the contact person at the sister school, in other words, the person in charge of the International Student Exchange Program. Make sure you keep in touch with that office, because they will become your lifeline, and will be able to help you when you arrive at the school. **DO NOT** call other departments at the sister school unless someone in the Student Exchange office tells you to. Often times, when you talk to too many different people, everyone says something different, and you remain confused, so pose your questions and concerns to the Student Exchange office, and they should be able to help you. Make sure that if you don't talk to the same person on a regular basis that the other people in the office have the same information. In other words, make sure the information you receive is consistent with what you've already been told. If you are ever confused, **ASK MORE QUESTIONS!** I know that sounds like common sense, but often times, we don't want to sound ignorant or stupid, so we don't ask questions that we need to ask. Do not ever let yourself feel confused about anything, because it will only get worse if you do. It's really important for you to be comfortable with your situation and also to be comfortable in knowing what to expect and what you need to do.

I can't stress enough though that you make sure that you don't talk to anyone ~~with the exception of the Student Exchange office. They are your connection~~ and your resource for the rest of the school. Utilize their services fully, that's what they're there for!! Don't ever feel like you are bothering them if you need something or have a question, go to them!!

B. Questions You Need To Ask In Addition To Your Own

- i. What should I bring with me?
- ii. About how much money do I need to bring?
- iii. Do I need to bring any special clothes for anything?
- iv. What are the dorm rooms like, and what do I need to bring with me for my room? Are all of my things going to fit in the room?
- v. Will I have a roommate?
- vi. Are there any special fees for the dorms? Do I have to pay a deposit? (If yes, will you get your money back when you leave?)
- vii. When will I be able to move into the dorms? Is there an elevator in the building?
- viii. Are there any special rules within the dorm buildings that I need to know about?
- ix. Are there washers and dryers to wash clothes? Will I have drawers to put my clothes in or will I have to hang them in a closet?
- x. Do I need my own computer?
- xi. When should I plan on arriving? Will someone pick me up from the airport?

- xii. Will I have to pay tuition or fees there or will it be taken care of here at Thomas More? If I have to pay there, about how much will it be?
- xiii. How will I have to travel if I want to leave campus (e.g. bus, cab, etc.)? About how much will that cost?
- xiv. Will I be able to go sightseeing? Will I be able to travel around the area around the school? How much will it cost me to explore?
- xv. Is there a way that I can get descriptions of the classes I'm planning on taking? (You have to know if you can handle the work load and how difficult the course will be in comparison with a class here at TMC)
- xvi. Do you know any of the professors for the classes I'm planning on taking? Will they be willing to work with me if I'm having trouble?
- xvii. Are the classes I'm planning on taking going to be worth my while?
- xviii. Are there going to be other exchange students there at the same time I will be there? If yes, will we all be rooming near each other?
- xix. How much will it cost to call home, and will I be able to call home from the dorm rooms? How much will it cost to send a letter home?
- xx. Are there any social norms that would be different for me that I should know about? Is there anything I should avoid doing that might be taken by others the wrong way?

c. *Language Barriers*

Make absolutely sure that if you are visiting a school where another language is spoken that you are proficient enough to be able to speak, or at least to understand that language when it is spoken by a native. Realize that when you first arrive, people are going to sound like the teacher on the Charlie Brown cartoons. Don't get discouraged, because it is only a matter of a few days to a week before you get pretty used to it, and you are able to pick out words, phrases and are able to understand the language.

If you are going to go to a school where a different language is spoken, make sure that you have a conversation with your contact person in that language to make sure that you will be able to understand and converse with the people where you are going. Even if that contact person says that you are not ready yet, trust me, it is better than getting to your destination and having trouble with the language the entire time. That discourages you and you quit trying.

Make sure you're ready to go!!

D. *Insurance Information*

You are going to need health insurance while you're at our sister school. If they don't ask you, double check your health plan and make sure that you will be covered while you are staying outside of the United States. If you are not covered by your plan, ask your contact person if you can purchase insurance through the school. The school should ask you to send proof that you are covered out of the United States by your insurance plan, so be prepared to send them the information that they need. Even if they don't ask for it, make sure you are covered, because in the unlikely event that something would happen to you while you are gone, you don't want to be uninsured, because you will pay a lot more and you might even be limited to where you can go to be treated. Don't forget to check on this, then remember to take your insurance card.

E. *Planning*

DO NOT wait until the last minute to start preparing to leave. Find out the schedule for the semester or term you are going for, and find out when you need to be there, and when you need to leave by as soon as you can. Get your flight booked as soon as you can so that you are able to get the lowest fares possible, and so that you know when you will be leaving and when you will be coming home.

Begin buying what you need a few weeks before you are leaving. Make a list and slowly get what you need so that you don't have to buy everything at once and so that you don't forget anything that you need. Ask friends or family to help you think of things that you will need or want to bring with you, because you will be less likely to forget something. When you are packing make sure to check things off your list as you go.

Call the Student Exchange office a day or two before you are supposed to arrive to be sure they still have your flight information, and if they are picking you up, to be sure where they will be when you arrive and what you should be looking for. If they are not picking you up, be sure that you are comfortable with your mode of transportation from the airport to the school. If you are planning on taking a taxi, be absolutely sure that you are able to tell the difference between a legitimate taxi and one that is posing as a cab in order to scam you. Also, if you are taking a taxi, ask the Student Exchange office for directions from the airport to the school so you can be sure that the driver is not trying to drive you all over in order to get more money from you.

Be sure that you have a contact number for individuals at Thomas More that you might need to talk to. You never know when something is going to come up, so be sure that you have a way to get in touch with someone in case something does happen and you need help, or if you have a question. (It

could be anything from tuition to a class problem or some problem with the school)

Most importantly, plan to have the time of your life. Plan to enjoy yourself and to take in as much as you can for the time that you are gone. Be sure to prepare for a little bit of culture shock, but be ready to accept and embrace the culture also. Don't be nervous, just be excited and ready to go.

F. *What to Take (also see checklist at the end)*

If you have ever lived in the dorms, you want to take all of the same things that you take from home to move into your room on campus. Just in case you have not lived in the dorms, I listed out some important things that you want to remember not to forget!!

Plenty of clothes, but take the clothes that you are comfortable in and that you like to wear. Don't try to completely change your wardrobe into your trendy but uncomfortable clothes, because you will be miserable. Bring a variety of clothes. There might be times when you need to dress up or when you need to be super casual, so make sure to ask, and even if they say no, still bring a variety. Don't forget to bring plenty of the essentials (undergarments), because you never know what might happen. (There was a dryer at the school I went to that liked to destroy underwear and socks, and believe me, I was glad I brought extra) Take a variety of shoes. You have no idea at this point what all you will be doing while you are there, so bring some nice shoes, bring some comfy shoes and bring any other shoes that you like. Of course, you can take as many pairs as you want, but you might not wear all of them, and they just add weight to what will be an already overloaded suitcase, so make sure to take at least those 3 types of shoes.

Remember to bring the things you need, like your toothbrush, hairbrush, hairdryer, etc., but don't freak out too much if you forget something, because there will be stores around that you can go to. You don't want to just wait until you get to your destination to buy all of the things that you need, because you may not get to the store for a couple of days and it's going to be a lot more expensive than things are here.

Shower shoes. Don't forget shower shoes, whether they be flip flops or any kind of shoe you can wear in the shower. Bring the essentials: shampoo, soap, razor, towels and washcloths. If you don't have enough room to bring a robe, just make sure you bring some long towels so you can wrap it around you. It's actually easier to take shower gel (body wash) with you rather than soap (sorry guys, but it is), because you don't have to worry about the soap getting all over your stuff when you pack. Also, if you go anywhere while your at the sister school, it's easier to close the body wash up and take it, rather than pack it up again. It's also easier to store in your room.

Bring some hangers if you have room, because chances are you're going to have to hang at least some of your stuff up. If you don't have the space, don't worry you can always buy some while you are there. You also want to get some type of cleaning supplies, because all schools aren't necessarily as clean and nice as our schools are. Remember you are stepping into another world and another culture, where nothing is the same.

Bring anything with you that you use on a regular basis (that you can pack), whether it be books or a computer or cards or a CD player, etc. You want to be as comfortable as possible while you are there, so bring the things that make you happy or comfortable. If you do bring your CDs, don't bring them all, because even though you think you will, I promise you won't listen to them all. Bring the CDs that you really like, that you listen to all the way through, and the ones that make you relax and make you feel better.

Remember to take some cash with you, but you don't want to walk around with too much in case you would get robbed or something else would happen. You can always cancel a credit card, but you can't always get cash back. Most of the places you will go to will take a credit card, just make sure you have some cash to pay for transportation and some small things that you'll need cash for.

G. Before You Leave Home

Remember to take care of your bills. Leave some blank signed checks for your parents or whoever to take care of paying your bills while you are gone. Also, if you have a cell phone and you plan to use it while you are gone (and can use it while you are gone) make sure that you are going to be in your coverage area. Also, make sure you increase the number of minutes for your plan, because you will probably be using it more often than you normally would at home. Also, if you're not going to be in your coverage area, see what you can do to minimize the roaming charges and the long distance fees.

If you have your own apartment, make sure that someone is either going to stay at your home or stop by to take care of things while you are gone. Make sure that someone comes to pick up your mail and someone goes to your place just to check on everything.

You also want to make sure that someone is taking care of your car. Have someone take it out for a spin every now and then to be sure that it doesn't sit for too long before you come back.

Make sure that everyone knows that you are going to be gone. You never know, they might throw you a going away party!!

H. *When to Arrive*

Talk to your contact person at the sister school. Ask them when you should arrive and if someone will be there to pick you up. Whatever you do, do not plan to arrive on a weekend day, because everything on campus is closed, and there may not be anyone there to help you with things, such as where to get food and where to get whatever you need. Be sure that someone will at least be there to meet you at the school when you arrive, if they can't pick you up from the airport. Make sure to ask where things are and where you're going to have to go to get supplies and things that you need.

I. *Navigating the School*

So you'll probably be taken on the same tour that you go on at every school where they show you where everything is as fast as they can, then they expect you to remember where everything is after the first time around. Make sure that you find someone who knows the school, or just go walk around by yourself and see where your classes are and where the library and other offices are. You'll probably want to find places like the Registrar's office, the Bursar's office, and anything else you think you might need. Make sure to find your classes though before the first day, because some of them can be hard to find.

If you have any trouble, don't hesitate to ask someone. Most people are more than willing to help you, and most people are probably going to be friendly. Try to find a buddy early on that you can go to classes with and who can help you with anything else you need to know about the school or the area. You don't want to have to feel alone, so find some people to hang out with.

Figure out how to use everything: the library, how the cafeteria works, what hours everything is open, where the computers are. Make sure you know how to access all of it, and what the procedure is for things like the library or some of the offices on campus. Ask either your contact person in the Study Abroad Office or someone on campus that you've met. Don't wait until the last minute when you need something though, because someone may not be able to help you at that time.

J. *Exploring the Area*

One of the most important things to do while you are studying abroad is to get to know the area around you. You will learn some from the school and from taking classes, but you will learn even more from traveling around the area. By getting to know how people live and work and what they do with their time off, you will learn to appreciate what you have and where you live more than ever. Plus by exploring you gain an awareness of what is going on in the world around you. This is a one time learning experience and I encourage you to take advantage of it in every way you can. Get to know the people and the culture. They have a lot of information to offer you.

The most important thing when you are out and about exploring is to be safe. Don't go anywhere alone, no matter how well you get to know the area or the people, and try to avoid bad neighborhoods. Make sure you have minimal cash with you when you go out, just in case something would happen, and make sure that you bring a cell phone (if you are able to use it) or some other safety item (such as pepper spray).

No matter what you do, make sure you take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. Don't waste any time while you are gone, because it goes very fast, and realize that you may never get the same opportunity again. Take a lot of pictures and save your memories, because most of mine are some of the best memories I have. I met some really cool people while I was in Puerto Rico, and I saw every inch of that island that I could see, and I loved every minute of it. I wouldn't trade that experience for anything.

Good luck and remember to have fun and take advantage of every opportunity you can. Oh yeah and don't forget to learn a little from classes. ☺

Packing Checklist – For Ladies

- Dressy Clothes
- Casual Clothes
- Bum around Clothes
- Pajamas
- Underwear
- Bras
- Socks
- Gym Shoes
- Dress Shoes
- Comfy Shoes
- Towels
- Washcloths
- Shampoo (Conditioner)
- Shower shoes
- Soap or Body Wash
- Lotion
- Robe (if room)
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Razors
- Fingernail Clippers (Fingernail File)
- Hairbrush
- Hair Dryer
- Hair Products
- Pads/Tampons
- CDs
- CD player
- Any Other Entertainment You Usually Use
- Laptop
- Hangers
- Sheets and Blankets
- Writing Stuff (envelopes, paper, etc. – if you want to send anything home)
- Calling Card
- Cell phone
- Cell phone charger
- Batteries
- Any kind of medication you are taking
- Some cash
- ATM card
- One or two credit cards
- Phone Number for Study Abroad Department at TMC
- Phone Number for Contact at Sister School (just in case)
- Any Emergency Contact Numbers

Packing Checklist – For Men

- Dressy Clothes
 - Casual Clothes
 - Bum around Clothes
 - Pajamas
 - Underwear
 - Socks
 - Gym Shoes
 - Dress Shoes
 - Comfy Shoes
 - Towels
 - Washcloths
 - Shampoo (Conditioner)
 - Shower shoes
 - Soap or Body Wash
 - Lotion
 - Robe (if room)
 - Toothbrush
 - Toothpaste
 - Razors
-
- Fingernail Clippers
 - Hairbrush/Comb
 - Hair Dryer
 - Hair Products
 - CDs
 - CD player
 - Laptop
 - Any Other Entertainment You Usually Use
 - Hangers
 - Sheets and Blankets
 - Writing Stuff (envelopes, paper, etc. – if you want to send anything home)
 - Calling Card
 - Cell phone
 - Cell phone charger
 - Batteries
 - Any kind of medication you are taking
 - Some cash
 - ATM card
 - One or two credit cards
 - Phone Number for Study Abroad Department at TMC
 - Phone Number for Contact at Sister School (just in case)
 - Any Emergency Contact Numbers