



In-country Travel Planning Guide

Planning for fun, safe, responsible and impactful experiences in port

With limited resources available on the ship and many competing priorities, we advise voyagers to start the planning process as soon as they are admitted. Voyagers should arrive at embarkation with a rough plan for each port. Where to begin?

Step 1: Go inward first! Before making plans, reflect and consider your own personal preferences. Experiences designed with intention from this foundation set voyagers up for the most fun, impactful, and fulfilling experience.

Suggested questions for reflection before making in-country travel plans:



Reflect on a previous experience that was impactful to you (whether travel or otherwise). Tease out a specific moment that was especially potent. Where were you? Who was there? What did it feel like? What were all the other factors around you that contributed to that moment? (Pay attention to lots of people or few? Nature or city? Active or low-key?)

Part B: Consider the alternative. Pin-point a moment where an experience left you disappointed, frustrated, or upset. What factors were at play that led to this result? What can you learn about yourself as a result?



Why did you apply to Semester at Sea? What expectations do you have about this experience? Do they need adjusting or are they realistic? How do you envision yourself feeling as you travel the world?



When you return home next semester, what will your friends/family say about how you've grown? What is one word you would use to describe yourself now? What is one word that captures your greatest hope for this experience? Your greatest fear?



What issue, information, academic course, social scenario, or body of knowledge makes you feel the most alive and passionate? How could you foster this during your voyage? Are there any organizations or individuals in the port cities with which you could connect?



Think of all your different social identities (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation, biological sex, national origin, religion, language and physical/emotional/developmental ability (also consider allergies and dietary restrictions)). How might these factors influence your planning? Are there any health/safety factors to research or consider?

Additional questions to consider:

- Do you like small groups or big groups? Are you an introvert or extrovert?
- Do you default to leading and taking charge or letting others take the wheel?
- Are you OK with “rolling with the punches” or do you prefer structure? What is comfort level with ...discomfort?
- What does your travel budget look like? Would you rather invest in a few big experiences or several smaller?
- What types of activities pair well with your personality and interests?



Step 2. Pencil-in any commitments. Use the [in-country planning worksheet](#) as a template and bring this worksheet with you to embarkation. Students and Faculty: start by penciling-in Field Classes. The Field Class is a required component of each academic course and no other travel can be planned for the same day.

Step 3. Google away! Building off of steps 1 and 2, start researching, dreaming, brainstorming AND budgeting! First, gather all your options. Then, prioritize.

- ✓ **Date-specific research:** Look up average climate, local festivals and events and average costs for lodging, food, entrance fees, etc. (*Note, holidays can drastically impact not only price but also availability of lodging and transportation options!*)
- ✓ **What is the region known for?** Research key industries, attractions, sites of cultural/ historical significance and nearby natural and recreation areas. (Resources such as Lonely Planet, Trip Advisor, Rick Steves and even Wikipedia can provide a good starting point.)
- ✓ **Gather examples.** Consider googling “sample 3/4 day itinerary in _____” ... many travel bloggers have curated suggested itineraries that highlight (in their opinions) the area’s key spots. Remember, however, to not blindly trust anonymous travel bloggers as your primary and sole source of information.
- ✓ **Download or Print.** As you come across useful resources, make sure to download to your device or print for future reference once internet access is limited.
- ✓ **DIY?** If arranging a-la-carte experiences yourself is more your style (vs. booking experiences through a company), you may want to research “package deals” in advance. In many locations, you can bundle entrance fees to popular sites (e.g. museums) and get a discount.
- ✓ **Book through a provider? Do your research.** If choosing to book an itinerary (or a single experience!) through another company, do your homework first. Be leery of any experience that promises a lot of freebies (especially alcohol) or is aggressively recruiting you. Regardless of whether it is an organized company, a fellow voyager, an SAS Alum or other, these types of experiences are usually not safe and similar types of experiences have harmed previous voyagers. If it feels too good to be true, then it probably is.
- ✓ **Free options?** Many larger cities have companies that offer free walking tours (usually with expected tips) or other similar options.

BOOKING LODGING & ACTIVITIES

Remember, the MV *World Odyssey* is available 24/7 as a “home base”!

- Shop & hire local!
- Critically read reviews on multiple sites (look for those with a high number of reviews), pay attention to the medium review, not overly positive or overly negative, look for commonalities.
- Prioritize lodging and activity options with flexible cancellation and refund policies (remember it is not uncommon for itinerary changes to occur!)
- Research neighborhoods for safety, access to public transportation, and nearby activities. (Ask about security practices at lodging.)
- Budget for extra potential charges such as tips, taxes, nightly resort fees, Wifi, etc.
- Read blogs / do your Yelp/ TripAdvisor research in advance and drop pins on your map apps for ease of reference once in-country
- **Tip!** For travelers with dietary restrictions, research ingredients in popular local dishes in advance. Bring notecards that have your restrictions listed out in each local language to show the server / kitchen.

TRANSPORTATION: Getting from place to place in unfamiliar locations can pose one of the biggest challenges (and risks!).

- When looking up approximate travel times between locations, be sure to also research road conditions and traffic patterns (what should take 10 minutes can often take an hour or more in many cities!) Always build in extra time to account for likely delays.
- What are the public transportation options? Research reliability and safety record of the options in advance. Some countries may have a robust train system, but unreliable bus system, for example. While others may be just the opposite.
- Research cost-saving options (e.g. buy a rail pass in advance)
- Do not plan on long distance travel by road after dark (e.g. overnight bus travel)
- Ask the staff at the location you are staying to arrange transportation for you (or advise on best options)
- If booking air travel, be aware of layover location (students not permitted to leave the country of arrival). Especially for small regional airlines, research safety track record and on-time departure/ arrival history.
- Remember the renting/ driving of motor or water vehicles (cars, scooters, mopeds, boats, etc.) is against SAS student policies. If traveling between locations by bike, kayak, etc., always check to make sure appropriate safety gear is provided.



Step 3. Continued... How to prioritize?

- a) Establish a budget.
- b) Narrow down your “must see/must do” list. Rank all your options based on their level of importance to you. Consider which countries you might be likely to return to down the road and which types of experiences are unique to SAS.
- c) Decide what you’ll plan on your own vs. booking SAS Field Programs
- d) Revisit Step 1. Are you prioritizing the right things for YOU?

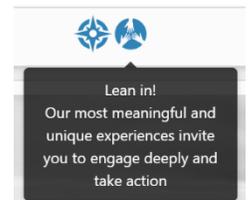
Deciding between SAS Field Programs or planning on your own? Consider this:

✓ LOCATION!

- **Some countries have more a developed infrastructure and travel industry.** It may be easier to get around on your own using public transportation throughout Japan than it is to travel in Ghana, for example.
- **Some ports are more remote than others.** The ship is not always located near major city-centers or airports/ train stations. It can be costly and time-consuming sorting out getting to and from the ship itself.
- **Be aware! Experiencing major attractions or ‘bucket-list’ sites may require extensive travel.** Many voyagers dream of visiting the Taj Mahal, for example, but don’t realize it is 2,470km from the port location (that’s the equivalent of visiting western Kansas and wanting to go to New York City for a weekend). By necessity, this requires tight logistics and little margin for error, which can be tricky to manage.

✓ WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES?

- Many Field Programs provide access to unique, meaningful and responsible experiences that would be hard (or impossible) to replicate on your own Look for the SAS Field Programs that have the “Lean In!” logo (→) and prioritize these programs.
- SAS Alumni regularly say they regret not participating in more homestays or culturally immersive programs. They may not seem glitzy or likely to make you Insta-famous, but homestays, meals with locals, cooking classes, school visits, etc. are likely to be some of the most memorable and impactful experiences you will have.



✓ HOW MUCH TIME & ENERGY ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE TO PLANNING? (And what about safety & contingency plans?)

- With limited access to planning tools (and time!) while at sea, it can be tricky to stay on top of planning for the next port. And you don’t want to waste your time in-country researching for the next country. SAS Field Programs take this stress out of the equation and allow you to be present in the moment.
- Expect the unexpected. Itinerary adjustments are common. If you plan travel yourself, consider the risks you’re assuming if the ship does not make it on time (or at all!)
- Safety is king. All SAS Field Programs work with contracted local partners with industry-standard certifications and trainings.

✓ HOW WILL YOU MEET NEW PEOPLE?

- Voyagers consistently report one of the best aspects of Field Programs is the opportunity to meet and interact with new people (students, Faculty & Staff and families, and Lifelong Learners.) Your new best friend could be waiting!



Step 4. Connect with other like-minded voyagers. Share your ideas, ask others for theirs. But remember, consider your personal preferences (step 1) and don't blindly follow others.

Step 5. Lock it in! Solidify your must-see/must-do experiences before embarkation.

Step 6. Repeat steps 2-6! Arrive at the ship with a rough outline of plans for each country. It's okay to have some holes in your plan, but be prepared to discuss your plans (or lack thereof!) with voyage leadership at the start of the voyage.

Tips for planning ahead to optimize health and safety while traveling in port:

- Consider insuring valuables (or better yet, don't bring them at all!)
- Speak with a travel health clinic about your specific travel locations and intended activities to discuss risks and illness prevention measures
- Make a plan for communication. Research international phone plans or the ability to purchase new SIM cards in each location. All voyagers should have access to a reliable form of communication and are encouraged to download and use the SAFETY emergency app. (Details provided closer to embarkation.)
- Leave copies of important documents (passport, visas, credit cards, etc.) at home and email copies to yourself.
- Obtain a small amount of cash in each currency in advance (as access to ATMs can be tricky or have long lines immediately upon arrival).
 - Notify banks/credit card companies of travel plans (consider researching financial institutions that do not charge ATM or international usage fees)
- Your in-country travel plans should influence your packing!
 - Some sites may require conservative dress.
 - Are you planning to do something that requires specific gear? (e.g. hiking boots, sleeping bag, etc.)
 - Be prepared for the elements. It's likely to be quite cold and very hot at some point during the voyage.
 - Pack items that will help facilitate intercultural exchange with locals (consider post cards or small items from your hometown; easy games and/or small toys; polaroid camera; small gifts to give to host families)
 - Consider referencing resources such as [Pack for a Purpose](#) and the [CDC's "Pack Smart"](#)
 - Make a plan for securing valuables while you're not on the ship (such as a sturdy cross-body purse or a more secure money belt, luggage lock, etc.)
 - Bring travel size toiletries & luggage suitable for short trips
 - Bring a good water bottle you will want to use! (consider one with a built-in filter)
 - (This is not exhaustive—make sure to reference the official [SAS Packing List!](#))